

Oral Public Meeting Comments Received on the
Scope of the Environmental Assessment for the
Benton Solar Project
Docket Nos. GS-23-423, ESS-24-283, and TL-23-425

Public Meetings

1. January 14, 2025 – Sauk Rapids, Minnesota, 6:00 p.m.
 - Seven speakers.
2. January 15, 2025 – Virtual, On-Line Meeting, 6:00 p.m.
 - One speaker, one attendee asking questions in the chat.

1 INFORMATION AND EA SCOPING MEETING

2 23-423, 24-283, 23-425

3 SAUK RAPIDS - JANUARY 14, 2025 - 6:00 P.M.

4 BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

5 AND MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

6
7 In the Matter of the Application of Benton Solar, LLC,
8 for the 100 MW Solar Energy Generating System for the
9 Benton Solar Project in Benton County, Minnesota; in the
10 Matter of the Application of Benton Solar, LLC, for a
11 Site Permit for the 100 MW Battery Energy Storage System
12 for the Benton Solar Project in Benton County,
13 Minnesota; and in the matter of the Application of
14 Benton Solar, LLC, for a Route Permit for a 115 kV
15 High-Voltage Transmission Line Associated with the
16 Benton Solar Project in Benton County, Minnesota

17
18 DOCKET NOS. IP7115/GS-23-423 (Solar Facility)
19 IP7115/ESS-24-283 (Storage Facility)
IP7115/TL-23-425 (Transmission Line)

20
21 SAUK RAPIDS
22 JANUARY 14, 2025
23 6:00 P.M.
24

25 STENOGRAPHIC COURT REPORTER: Jacquelyn Young, RPR

1 APPEARANCES:

2
3 MICAH J. REVELL, Attorney-at-Law,
4 Stinson LLP; micah.revell@stinson.com, appeared for
5 and on behalf of the Applicant.
6

7 PUC STAFF: Cezar Panait
8

9 DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE: Logan Hicks,
10 Energy Environmental Review and Analysis
11

12 BENTON SOLAR: Adam Gracia, Josh Adams,
13 Heena Dhorajia, Iris Andersen, David Stroup, Cody
14 MacDonald
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24 WHEREUPON, the following proceedings

25 were duly had and entered of record, to wit:

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Good evening,
3 everyone. My name is Cezar Panait. I'm an
4 engineer with the Minnesota Public Utilities
5 Commission in St. Paul, Minnesota, and we want to
6 welcome you to tonight's Public Utilities
7 Commission's public information and environmental
8 assessment scoping meeting.

9 And that is on Benton Solar project
10 application for actually three permits. So Benton
11 Solar is proposing to build a 100-megawatt solar
12 energy system in Benton County not far from here,
13 about four miles east. There will be a storage
14 facility; that is, battery energy storage in
15 containers, and then we will talk about the project
16 specifications more. And the size of that battery
17 energy storage is also 100 megawatts.

18 And there is a short transmission
19 line associated with both of these projects, .5
20 miles in length, 115-kilovolts to interconnect both
21 projects to the grid, and that will be through the
22 existing substation owned by Great River Energy,
23 the local co-operative company.

24 MS. TAMARA SELL: Where will those
25 lines be?

1 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: The lines will
2 be -- We have maps, and we also, in the docket,
3 there is an application for a high-voltage
4 transmission line, and there are detailed maps
5 showing the alignment and the proposed route of
6 that transmission line.

7 So tonight's meeting agenda, the
8 items before the Public Utilities Commission, so
9 I'm going to talk about the -- the -- the process,
10 the permitting process that will be typical for an
11 energy infrastructure project like this one goes
12 through, and then I'll pass it over to NextEra or
13 Benton Solar Energy, they're a -- they're a
14 subsidiary, to talk about the project specifics.

15 And then I'll hand it over to my
16 colleague to the right, Logan Hicks from the
17 Department of Commerce, and he is going to talk
18 about the Commerce's role in reviewing this -- this
19 project, this application for -- for actually three
20 permits.

21 So there are -- there are three
22 permits that are involved in this review process,
23 and the review of the application happens before --
24 before the Commission acts on the application to --
25 for a permit; that is, a site permit or a route

1 permit. It's a process, a review process that
2 lasts up to one year, and the agencies involved
3 with that review process by the legislature are the
4 Public Utilities Commission, which is the state
5 required commission or state government or state
6 agency comprised about -- from about 70 full-time
7 staffers and six appointed commissioners. And the
8 commissioners serve six years staggered terms and
9 they are appointed by the governor and confirmed by
10 the -- by the Minnesota Senate.

11 And one of the roles of the
12 Commission is to review and issue permits for
13 building large energy projects such as the large
14 solar or all of them and high-voltage transmission
15 lines.

16 And then the other department is the
17 Department of Commerce, and they will speak about
18 their roles and responsibilities.

19 And then later on, we already have a
20 judge assigned to this case from the Office of
21 Administrative Hearings, and the judge is not here
22 tonight, but she will be presiding over the -- the
23 public hearings later on in -- in August.

24 Because this is a contested case,
25 meaning we have some parties, namely labor, who are

1 intervening in the docket, meaning they want to
2 fully develop their reasoning, their arguments, and
3 there will be a series of hearings - one scoping
4 meeting, one evidentiary hearing so later on for
5 the -- for the judge, and the judge will -- will
6 provide a findings of fact and conclusions and
7 submit that to the Commission as an advisory.

8 The Commission has the ultimate
9 decision to issue or deny a permit, but before that
10 the information the judge will be compiling will be
11 advisory to the Commission. And she will be making
12 findings and recommendations as to the permits and
13 as to -- as to what conditions should go into those
14 permits.

15 Before I go any further, I -- I want
16 to mention -- Yes.

17 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: May she ask a
18 question?

19 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Yes.

20 MS. TAMARA SELL: You said this is
21 being contested. Is it -- I don't know what the
22 conditions of that are. Are these homeowners --

23 COURT REPORTER: Excuse me. They're
24 going to have to come up to the podium and talk.

25 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Can we -- can we

1 wait on those questions, please, because we have
2 plenty of time. We want to speed up through the --
3 through the presentation part and we want to get to
4 everyone's questions right after that. We expect
5 it not to take more than 30 minutes for the
6 presentation.

7 So I'm going to -- On the -- on the
8 table next to the -- the wall near the window, we
9 have some handouts. Please go ahead and -- and
10 help yourself. We have copies of the PowerPoint.
11 We've got copies of the notice for tonight's
12 meeting that you all must have received in the
13 mail. We've got some blank comment forms. We've
14 got some fact sheets about transmission lines.

15 And also we have this little comment
16 card for people who are interested in having their
17 names placed on the project contact list. So you
18 will be -- you fill this out and we'll -- we'll
19 enter this into a service list, and every time
20 there is a new document being submitted into the
21 record, you will receive an e-mail notification so
22 you become aware of a new filing having been
23 submitted.

24 So with that, so the project -- I'm
25 not sure I already spoke about this one, and next

1 we'll go into more details about the 100-megawatt
2 solar generating system and the 100-megawatt
3 battery energy storage system.

4 The project will be roughly 632 acres
5 of private land out of a larger parcel of land.
6 And so the -- the land is -- is privately owned,
7 and NextEra will be securing easements for that
8 land. So they will talk about that. So there's no
9 eminent domain process involved here, so it's
10 solely voluntary participation.

11 The project also will include a
12 substation, a project substation as opposed to the
13 existing GRE transmission substation. So all the
14 power will be funneled through underground cables
15 to that project substation for collecting the rows
16 of panels and from the battery energy storage. And
17 from there it will be taken over to GRE's overhead
18 115 -- to a short 115-kilovolt transmission line
19 that will be developed by the project -- as part of
20 the project.

21 So I mentioned briefly about the --
22 the permits. One of the roles that the Commission
23 has, so the Commission regulates the three tiers
24 of -- of the service industry. One is the
25 electricity. It regulates the electricity, meaning

1 in terms of approving the rates for -- for
2 electricity for locally owned utilities. The
3 Commission does not set rates for co-operatives or
4 municipalities. They have their own board who --
5 who sets their rate.

6 And the other general role of the
7 Commission is to review and approve permits, such
8 as the site permits, high-voltage transmission
9 lines for large energy facilities. And the
10 legislature is very clear about what are the --
11 what are the thresholds for -- for the type of
12 project, the energy project, and what's the
13 thresholds for that.

14 So for a -- for a site permit for the
15 solar project, that one permit is required because
16 the facility exceeds 50 megawatts in size.

17 Similarly, for the battery storage
18 portion of the project, a permit is required
19 because it exceeds 10 megawatts in size.

20 And for the route permit -- a route
21 permit for the transmission line is required
22 because the voltage operates more than 100
23 kilovolts and the length is greater than 1,500 feet
24 in length.

25 And -- and so after we present,

1 the -- the process, the due process is where we
2 take comments. There's an -- there's an entire
3 year at the beginning of the project. So, again,
4 with this review process, the Commission is looking
5 at guidance from, again, from the legislature as to
6 what are the considerations that the Commission
7 should be looking at in -- in granting or denying
8 the permit application.

9 So these are some of the -- this
10 here, this slide is some of the -- This is not
11 complete. So the Commission looks for the
12 potential human and environmental impacts of the
13 proposed project. They look at the impacts such as
14 noise, aesthetics, public health, land use,
15 cultural and historic resources, air quality, water
16 quality, wildlife, fauna. And also the Commission
17 is always looking for ways to -- to minimize or
18 mitigate any -- any -- any impacts.

19 This project is being proposed to
20 provide power because the -- the electric systems
21 in Minnesota need to be kept reliable, and the
22 generation is shifting from -- from traditional
23 power plants to renewable sources. So this project
24 is being looked at in the context of maintaining
25 and -- and -- and the system reliability overall,

1 which is also being referred to as the grid, the
2 power grid so.

3 And -- and the cost is also a factor.
4 So the process of constructing, operating, and
5 maintaining the facility are also looked at because
6 ultimately the -- the electricity ratepayers and
7 customers will pay the rates. They are the ones
8 who will be paying for this project.

9 We don't know -- the company does not
10 have a designated goal on paper, but I think they
11 will be looking at and -- and identifying the local
12 utility or a large industrial customer who will
13 benefit from that power generated by this project.

14 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: So you don't
15 even have a customer in mind when you're going to
16 build this?

17 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: I don't know
18 myself, but I will tell you the company, more than
19 likely they do, so I will let them speak about
20 that.

21 So we have the schedule here. So this
22 is a year-long process that I was -- I was
23 mentioning. So -- so the application was -- And
24 we can look here, but the Commission met in an open
25 meeting back in December and they reviewed the

1 applications. We have two applications. There's a
2 joint application for a site permit for the solar
3 battery storage and they have a separate route
4 permit application for the transmission line.

5 So the Commission took up both --
6 both of these applications back in December, and so
7 we have to look at the completion of the
8 application to make sure that the application --
9 And there's copies for reference on the table.
10 They include all the requirements in terms of
11 information, data that's required as part of the
12 statutes and the rules. So the Commission deems
13 those applications as being complete.

14 So as part of the due process we are
15 doing here tonight, we started at that point, from
16 December. And the remaining timeline, so we are
17 meeting here tonight on the scope of the -- the
18 environmental assessment. We are meeting tomorrow
19 virtually via WebEx. And the meeting tomorrow with
20 the Commission, about how to attend that, is also
21 included in the notice.

22 After that we have the big
23 milestones, and they are based on some intermediary
24 milestones, but we -- we just took it to -- like a
25 high level finally. So there will be an EA --

1 Environmental EA, I think it is. The EA decision
2 in March, and Logan will talk about that. And then
3 the actual environmental document later on in July.

4 And then we will be meeting most
5 likely here. We like this venue and we'll propose
6 this to the judge and the judge will perhaps agree.
7 So we'll be meeting here in August of this year.

8 And then following that, the judge
9 will be compiling that report that I mentioned
10 about, the findings of fact, the conclusions of
11 law, and recommendation, and submit that record in,
12 formally submit it to the Commission, in November.

13 And then shortly after that, within
14 60 days, we will be -- or the Commission will be
15 meeting one -- one more time in an open meeting,
16 open -- open format at the Commission's
17 headquarters in St. Paul to debate and -- and
18 decide on -- on an outcome for the -- for the
19 permit applications.

20 So there will be a comment period.
21 The comment period actually is open ever since
22 we -- we sent out this notice for the meeting in
23 December, December 26th, but the important date to
24 remember is the deadline by which Logan is
25 expecting the comments because, again, the

1 comments -- I mean, we take comments regardless of
2 when you have comments here in the year's process,
3 and those comments go to the Commission.

4 And if you have specific comments
5 about a -- the environmental document, Logan will
6 ask you to please send those comments to Logan.
7 And these are the -- the three ways that the
8 comments will be received. Either you go online
9 and there is a link where you can -- you can type
10 your comments live once you get to that website, or
11 you can e-mail them to Logan, or you can use the
12 mail, handwrite or type them and -- and -- and mail
13 them through the mail service.

14 And then when you do the comments, I
15 I may just ask you to please focus your -- your
16 comments on -- on some of the issues that the
17 Commission will deal with in the meeting notice.
18 Again, going back to the same, what are -- what are
19 some of the potential human and -- and
20 environmental impacts that you see being caused by
21 this project, ways to minimize, avoid, mitigate
22 those impacts. And then if you know there are
23 specific characteristics of the project that can
24 be -- can be avoided or mitigated, please go ahead
25 and identify all those.

1 And then on the right side of the
2 page is more information, additional sources of
3 information where you can find out more about this
4 project. The comments, you can go into a project
5 specific website, this is a hot link, and you
6 can -- you can go in there and learn about the --
7 the applications, you can learn about major
8 documents.

9 And then if you want to find out
10 everything about the record, you can visit the
11 Commission's edocket system, which is an internal
12 filing system. Once you go to the Commission's
13 website, you will -- which is MN.gov/PUC, and then
14 you go to edockets, and there you have to enter the
15 docket numbers. Then for this project, the docket
16 numbers are the three ones that are on the -- on
17 the front page, or 23-423 is for the solar, 24-283
18 is for the storage, and 23-425 pertains to the
19 transmission line.

20 And you can -- Sorry. You can
21 subscribe to the docket again by providing your --
22 your e-mail address. When you subscribe, you
23 get -- every time there's a new document being
24 filed, you will get a little notification, and you
25 can go in and see what that new filing is about.

1 And then there is also the contact.
2 So we have Logan Hicks here, and this is me,
3 Cezar Panait. So you can e-mail me or actually
4 phone me.

5 So I just want to remind you that the
6 Commission is a neutral party to this by -- by
7 statute. We don't get involved into -- I mean,
8 personally. Even the staffers, we even list the
9 staffers and the commissioners themselves. I don't
10 concern myself with the matters regarding the
11 merits of this project.

12 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Who pays you?
13 Who pays you?

14 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: The State of
15 Minnesota.

16 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Who pays you?

17 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: The State of
18 Minnesota.

19 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: So you're
20 representing the State of Minnesota here?

21 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Yes, sir.

22 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: So you're not
23 impartial.

24 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Yes, I am impartial
25 to the project because by statute and by rule --

1 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: You're not
2 impartial. If you're getting paid by the State of
3 Minnesota, you're not impartial here.

4 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: No, because there's
5 established law, there's statutes and rules that
6 describe precisely how these projects have to be --

7 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: You're not
8 impartial in all this. You were brought into this
9 first instead of having somebody file and have you
10 file this meeting afterwards.

11 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: That's --

12 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: That's what
13 you would have done if you were impartial. You're
14 not impartial.

15 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: I don't --

16 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: You all have
17 an agenda.

18 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: I don't want to
19 speak for the applicant, but I know there is some
20 outreach when the project reaches the -- the
21 level --

22 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: You're still
23 liable for what's going on here.

24 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: So, like I said,
25 I -- I don't get involved into the merits of the

1 project. We have to analyze the facts and the data
2 that is being provided, comments we receive from
3 people like you, agencies. We are not part of the
4 Department of Transportation, the MPCA. So all the
5 state agencies, we are not --

6 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Exactly.
7 You're not impartial.

8 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: I'm --

9 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: I don't hear
10 you --

11 COURT REPORTER: Excuse me, sir. I'm
12 going to ask that you come to the podium and state
13 your name and spell it, please.

14 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Do I have to do
15 that now?

16 COURT REPORTER: You have to --

17 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Can I ask
18 questions now?

19 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: No. Just wait.
20 Sorry. Just wait.

21 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: You're just
22 rambling on.

23 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: I am done. I'm
24 done. And then we have a project advisor,
25 Jacques Harvieux. He's back in the office and he

1 also is -- his job is to help people learn how to
2 get involved or when can they comment, when is my
3 next opportunity, what is the filing that was just
4 made. So any questions about the process. And --
5 and -- so we can -- we can certainly attempt to
6 answer those.

7 And as far as the merits and as to
8 that, those merits will be analyzed by the
9 commissioners by looking at the full docket. The
10 judge will be compiling and making her
11 recommendations, and the commissioners
12 themselves --

13 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: How can the
14 merits be analyzed if you don't even know who
15 you're selling -- selling your energy to?

16 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: No, that will be --
17 that will be divulged. That will --

18 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: You're --
19 you're looting our property rights on pure
20 speculation here on what you think you can make by
21 your investment. That's what you're doing --

22 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: We're not --

23 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: -- by not
24 compensating anybody locally. You think that's
25 funny. This isn't funny.

1 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: No, no. No, it's
2 not -- it's not funny. I mean, it's just we have
3 to --

4 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: This is pure
5 speculation on your part.

6 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: No, sir. No.

7 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: You said it
8 was speculation. You said -- you said you have
9 nobody to sell the project to yet.

10 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: No, no, no. I said
11 I don't think they have a -- a business to sell the
12 power to, but that doesn't mean they don't --

13 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: What am I
14 misunderstanding here? We're both speaking English
15 here.

16 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Yes.

17 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: You just said
18 you don't have anybody to sell the power to.

19 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Yes.

20 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Correct?

21 MR. MICAH REVELL: Are we supposed to
22 be doing Q and A right now?

23 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Yeah, we'll go --

24 MR. MICAH REVELL: It's supposed to
25 be on the record.

1 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Yeah, we'll go --
2 Yeah. So I think the calculation --

3 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: You're seeking
4 somebody to buy the power that you propose to
5 create.

6 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Yes.

7 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Yes. That's
8 speculation.

9 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: It's a state
10 agency, so the -- the Applicant will attempt to
11 answer all those questions, if you may.

12 Okay. So with that, we're right on
13 point. So the next item on the agenda will be to
14 talk about project specific issues.

15 MR. MICAH REVELL: Good evening,
16 everyone. My name is Micah Revell. I am outside
17 counsel to NextEra Energy Resources and also
18 Benton Solar, the Applicant here. You will hear
19 very little from me. I will speak on the legal
20 process specifically. I'm going to pass the -- the
21 mic here to Adam Gracia.

22 MR. ADAM GRACIA: Good evening,
23 everyone. My name is Adam Gracia. I'm a senior
24 project manager with NextEra Energy Resources and
25 the project developer for Benton Solar.

1 Next slide, please.

2 So this is the agenda that we're
3 going to cover today; the overview of the Applicant
4 and the project as a whole. I will go through the
5 timeline and the benefits, excuse me, and go into
6 the different portions of the project, the solar
7 project, the battery storage project, and the
8 transmission line.

9 Next slide, please.

10 So Benton Solar, LLC, is a wholly
11 owned, indirect subsidiary of NextEra Energy
12 Resources or NEER. NEER is the world's largest
13 generator of renewable energy from wind and sun.
14 We're also an industry leader in battery storage.

15 The Benton Solar project is comprised
16 of solar generation facilities, a battery energy
17 storage system, and a transmission line.

18 So the proposed project is located
19 entirely in Benton County, Minnesota, specifically
20 in Minden Township, and is made up of three
21 components: Solar generating facilities of 100
22 megawatt will generate clean, renewable energy in
23 the state of Minnesota. The battery energy solar
24 facility has a 100 megawatt, four hour energy solar
25 system. It can store up to 400 megawatt hours of

1 renewal energy generated by the solar facility and
2 it can also charge the grid.

3 Both the solar and the battery
4 storage facility will share a half mile
5 transmission line of 115 kV transmission line,
6 which will connect our collector substation to the
7 Great River Energy Benton County substation.

8 This transmission line is located
9 entirely on private easements. We're not utilizing
10 any public right-of-way for the project.

11 So here's a quick overview of the
12 project timeline. We submitted our application,
13 again, in September of last year. At the end of --
14 on December 19th, the application was deemed
15 complete, as was mentioned.

16 Our next step, as we go through the
17 permitting process, will be procuring major
18 equipment for the project in the first quarter of
19 this year. We expect a decision by the Public
20 Utilities Commission by the end of this year, and
21 then construction would begin the second quarter of
22 2026. The project will be operational by the end
23 of 2027.

24 So there's a lot of benefits that
25 come with this project. There's a significant

1 capital investment in Benton County, so over \$300
2 million for the solar storage project. During
3 construction there will be approximately 150 to 300
4 temporary construction jobs. Again, that will be
5 in 2026 to 2027. There will be also two to three
6 full-time jobs to operate the facility.

7 During the construction period you'll
8 see an increase in local business, and during the
9 entire life of the project will be annual payments
10 to the landowners who are hosting the
11 infrastructure. But beyond that, there's benefit
12 to the greater community, so we are paying a
13 production tax to the State of Minnesota -- sorry,
14 not to the State of Minnesota, but to Benton County
15 and to Minden Township. So we estimate \$200,000 a
16 year in production -- solar production tax payments
17 going to Benton County and \$50,000 per year going
18 to Minden Township.

19 The battery storage project also
20 provides a wide range of benefits. It provides
21 grid stability and reliability. We'll go a little
22 bit more in depth on the battery storage project in
23 the coming minutes.

24 And then also involved will be local
25 organizations. So we want to be a part of the

1 community in Benton County, and, you know, as we'll
2 show in our slides, we've been doing that for the
3 last couple of years and it's something we want to
4 continue doing.

5 Here's an overview of our preliminary
6 site plan. So on the left you'll see solar
7 facilities, and the orange box on the left is the
8 battery storage facility. Those are going up in
9 the corner over here. So on the right is our
10 transmission line. So, again, it's a short half
11 mile transmission line located entirely on private
12 land.

13 Next slide, please.

14 The Benton Solar project will
15 generate up to 100 megawatts of clean, renewable
16 energy. The site will utilize approximately 600
17 acres for the photovoltaic panels, access roads,
18 and the collector substation.

19 The project will utilize a tracking
20 rack system for the solar panels, which means they
21 will track the sun throughout the day so they won't
22 always be facing the same direction.

23 Next slide, please.

24 They will be connected via
25 underground 34.5 kilovolt collection lines. These

1 lines carry the power that's generated from the
2 solar panels to our collector substation. The
3 collector substation will then step the power up
4 from 34.5 kilovolts to 115 kilovolts and will be
5 carried through the transmission line.

6 So the battery energy storage system
7 helps optimize the way we -- the power grid
8 delivers electricity to customers. So it helps
9 smooths out fluctuations in frequency and voltage
10 and reduces energy losses and waste. It reduces
11 some of the need for system upgrades to the grid
12 as a whole and extends the hours a renewable energy
13 project can operate. So, you know, during the --
14 during the day, the solar project is charging the
15 battery, and when the sun goes down, the battery
16 can discharge that to the system.

17 So the battery facilities are
18 comprised of large containers which are filled with
19 racks of smaller battery cells. It's a relatively
20 small footprint for the amount of energy it can
21 store. For this project it will be approximately
22 176 containers. And, like I said, it stores power
23 and provides energy when needed. So when energy
24 demand is low, the batteries can charge from the
25 solar project connected to the grid and can store

1 that energy, and then when demand is high, it can
2 discharge that energy to meet the current demand.

3 And they are also long-term
4 investments. We expect the batteries to be
5 operating for the life of the solar project.

6 So our battery design will
7 incorporate the latest National Fire Protection
8 Association and Underwriters Laboratory safety
9 standards which are, you know, key aspects for
10 safety. There are new codes and standards to
11 address all fire risks and mitigation in our
12 design, and we take those into account in our
13 equipment procurement, equipment selection, and our
14 actual construction and operation of the facility.

15 This includes a first responder
16 orientation and site-specific safety plans. So
17 we've already started that outreach with the local
18 fire department and Benton County Emergency
19 Management Office. We provide a battery
20 orientation, which shows them exactly, you know,
21 what -- what the infrastructure looks like and we
22 talk through the fire safety and mitigations that
23 we have.

24 We also have remote monitoring for
25 the battery storage facility, so we have a 24/7

1 remote operations control center, which can monitor
2 the status of every single battery cell and
3 identify multiple conditions as they come.

4 Again, safety is our number one
5 priority with our battery storage facilities. The
6 safety of our employees, neighbors, and the public
7 are always top of mind for us. So, again, that
8 comes from the testing and the standards and the
9 codes that we need to meet as we procure the
10 equipment and install and construct the battery and
11 then also through the life of the project's
12 operation.

13 The last portion of the project is
14 the transmission line. So, again, this is a half
15 mile 115 kV transmission line that delivers the
16 power generated by the solar project, the solar
17 battery project, to the point of interconnection.
18 That's the, again, the Benton County substation,
19 which is managed by NEER.

20 The transmission line, again, is
21 entirely on private easements. The map that we
22 have over there shows where it's going from our
23 collector substation straight into Great River
24 Energy's larger substation.

25 The actual structure height will vary

1 depending on the terrain as we cross the property
2 but will not exceed 110 feet above the ground.

3 Here's a list of some, but not all,
4 stakeholder outreach that we've done to date.
5 We've been developing this project for a few years
6 now. Our focus has been on advising, educating,
7 and consulting with the community on this project.

8 So, again, this is a list of some of
9 the agencies that we've reached out to, but not
10 all, and this is an ongoing effort. It doesn't end
11 here. It's something we will continue doing
12 through the development of the project, the
13 permitting, construction, and operation.

14 That's it. So thank you all for
15 coming out. We look forward to working with
16 everyone here to move forward with this project.

17 Again, I just want to highlight that
18 this is a significant capital investment to the
19 county here; again, over \$300 million. There are
20 benefits to landowners and small businesses, to the
21 community as a whole through our solar production
22 tax that we will pay, and there will be
23 environmental benefits of, you know, bringing 100
24 megawatts of clean energy to the grid and helping
25 Minnesota meet their state goals for carbon free

1 energy.

2 And like I said before, the community
3 engagement that we shared before, that doesn't end
4 today, but it goes on through the life of this
5 project. We want to be a part of this community,
6 you know, for the entire 30-year life of the solar
7 project.

8 Here's some information on the
9 project. We have a website and e-mail,
10 BentonSolar@nexteraenergy.com. That also has my
11 cellphone and my personal e-mail if you would like
12 to reach out to me directly for any questions or
13 comments on the project.

14 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Thank you, Adam.

15 As he said before, my name is Logan
16 Hicks. I work with the Department of Commerce. My
17 position is environmental review manager, and what
18 I do there is I create the environmental assessment
19 document that will be reviewing the project.

20 And I'll go a little bit more in
21 depth on that, but I just want to start out by
22 thanking everyone for coming out tonight.
23 Everybody coming here helps makes my job easier and
24 it will help direct the focus of my environmental
25 assessment, which I'll go over more here in a bit.

1 So just a quick rundown of everything
2 I want to go over tonight. The Department of
3 Commerce, Energy Environmental Review Analysis,
4 that's my unit. I'm going to kind of cover what we
5 do. I'm going to talk a little bit about the
6 environmental review that I -- you know, that I
7 write for this.

8 Then we're going to talk about how to
9 comment on different things you would like to see
10 in the review, and then we can also finish with
11 questions or have a little Q and A session at the
12 end as well.

13 So the Department of Commerce is
14 tasked by the Public Utilities Commission to
15 prepare an environmental assessment. Now, this
16 environmental assessment is just a -- it's a
17 lengthy environmental document. It will cover a
18 few different things, but the objective of the
19 environmental assessment itself is to evaluate
20 potential human and environmental impacts. It
21 is -- it looks at different strategies to help like
22 avoid or minimize -- minimize or mitigate those
23 impacts.

24 The design is that it's supposed to
25 be a neutral third-party review of just, this is

1 the project, this is what it will do to the
2 environmental if it's put in place. And the idea
3 is that this is a document that is going to be
4 given to the PUC so they can make an informed
5 decision on should this go or should it not, right,
6 and what are the impacts that are going to happen.

7 So the big reason we're here today is
8 for the public information scoping session here.
9 We want to gather from everyone here the different
10 environmental factors that we should be looking at.

11 If you look at the table over there,
12 there is a draft scoping decision and there's a
13 table of contents, if you would, there that kind of
14 covers the different environmental impacts that we
15 look to standard, but, however, there's -- it's --
16 it's kind of a broad shot. We're kind of casting a
17 wide net there, and we really want to focus that in
18 on, you know, things you guys care about because
19 this is your community and this is -- you guys know
20 it better than, you know, us. I live an hour and a
21 half away so, you know, I want to know what you
22 guys think, I want to know what I should be looking
23 at in this environmental review document.

24 So some things to look at are like
25 different impacts, like different things. Like if

1 you notice, you know, there's a river or a creek
2 running through there that we didn't see on the map
3 or something and you want us to call that out,
4 that's a good thing to bring up to me, you know.
5 Different ways that we can strat -- different
6 strategies we can use to help like mitigate
7 impacts, you know, that would be adverse to you
8 folks; right.

9 If there's different things like
10 specific permit conditions that you would like to
11 see, you can recommend those and we'll take a look
12 at it. You know, anything that -- anything that
13 you guys notice that wasn't in the draft -- in the
14 application that you would like me to look at, I
15 will, you know, take that into consideration for
16 sure.

17 So, yeah, I will do a -- I'll do a
18 draft scoping decision, and that will come out
19 when -- He -- he has the timeline there. I forget
20 exactly.

21 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: March.

22 MR. LOGAN HICKS: March, March of this
23 year. That's when I'll have the draft scoping
24 decision out and then in July I'll have the
25 environmental assessment.

1 So there's also a transmission line
2 associated with this, and transmission lines, we
3 take route alternative suggestions with those. So
4 if it's going through something or over something
5 that, you know, you feel is going to be impactful
6 negatively, negatively impactful, you can make a
7 route alternative suggestion.

8 Now, those -- the best way to do
9 those is to say, hey, it's going through this and
10 we're going to have to cut down a lot of trees, why
11 don't you put it through here and we won't have to
12 cut down so many.

13 Now, granted, that is an example. I
14 don't know if this line is actually going to have
15 to cut down any trees. That's just an example.
16 The idea is that you present the impact and present
17 the mitigative, you know, route alternative.

18 You can't -- you can just say, I
19 don't like it going there because I don't like it
20 going there, but that's not really mitigating any
21 sort of impact; right. So it's best to have, you
22 know, a viable option there and make sure that
23 it's also feasible. You know, you can't say, why
24 don't you go five miles west, ten miles south and,
25 you know, five miles east again; right. Like that

1 doesn't make any sense; right.

2 So please make it feasible for us to
3 look at, and it has to have a mitigative impact,
4 impact mitigation.

5 So this is the way to comment that
6 Cezar kind of went over. There's the web address
7 there. You can e-mail me. You can send me a
8 letter in the mail. You can even -- Over there is
9 a comment form. You can trifold it and put a stamp
10 on it and it will go right to me. But if you want
11 to fill it out tonight and leave it here with me as
12 well, I'll take those.

13 We will also have the option to come
14 up and speak at the end. You know, you can ask
15 questions or you can say, hey, this is how I feel
16 about things. You know, whatever you guys want to
17 do, how you want to get it to me. You can do it
18 any way. You just can't call me because it has to
19 be on the record, and we have the court reporter
20 here putting everything on the record today.

21 And just make sure you have all those
22 comments to me by January 31st. That is -- you
23 know, just by the end of the day January 31st will
24 be great. If it comes in a little later, that's
25 fine, you know, but try to be timely with it,

1 please.

2 So some commenting etiquette today.
3 Commenting and questions, anytime we're doing a
4 verbal, you know, questioning or commenting up
5 here, please just one person at a time. We'll call
6 you guys up. Please state and spell your name
7 clearly so our court reporter can, you know, have
8 it written down on the record.

9 Please limit your comments to a few
10 minutes. We don't want, you know, 30-minute, you
11 know, filibusters going on here, please.

12 And always maintain respect for
13 others. You know, everyone has different opinions,
14 everyone has different views. So no name calling,
15 no jabbing at anybody, and please try to direct
16 your comments to the scope of the environmental
17 assessment. You know, that's the main reason we're
18 here today, but, yeah, try to really focus on that.

19 All right. So with that, we will
20 call some people up. I don't think anybody signed
21 up on the paper.

22 Cezar, will you check, please?

23 MR. LOGAN HICKS: On the screen here
24 is just some topics to think about while you're --
25 you know, I guess in your head planning if you

1 would like to ask any questions or have any
2 comments.

3 Nothing, Cezar?

4 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: No.

5 MR. LOGAN HICKS: All right. So would
6 anybody like to speak?

7 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: I would like
8 to speak.

9 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Please come up.

10 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: I use this?

11 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Yes.

12 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Michael
13 Odenthal, O-d-e-n-t-h-a-l.

14 First question, how many of you live
15 by the proposed area? Any of you?

16 You said that you were going to be
17 part of the community. Is that like the long
18 distance part or where is that? I mean, how are
19 you going to be part of the community. You're not
20 part of this community.

21 MR. ADAM GRACIA: So once it's
22 operational, we will have two to three full-time
23 employees who are NextEra Energy Resources
24 employees who are going to be living and working
25 here.

1 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Local people?
2 You're going to -- you're going to have local
3 people in that facility, is what you're saying?

4 MR. ADAM GRACIA: Correct. Working --
5 working as the operations and maintenance people.

6 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: What's really
7 insulting about all of this is you guys just came
8 in, never spoke to any homeowners in the area,
9 never offered us any compensation for what you know
10 is going to devalue our properties. Not one of
11 you, especially you, (gestures) came to our homes
12 and knocked on our doors and said, hey, this is
13 what we're proposing.

14 You just assumed that we're going to
15 roll over like a couple of these other guys did and
16 this is just all going to be all right. Correct?
17 That's just what you guys assumed. Well, that's
18 not the way it is.

19 What -- what's your expected
20 revenues? I mean, when this is up and running,
21 what are you going to be making on this
22 profit-wise? I'm a business owner. What are you
23 going to be making in profit? Don't tell me you
24 don't know. What is it? Throw me a number.

25 MR. ADAM GRACIA: So we're still in

1 ongoing negotiations for an off taker so we --

2 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Oh, come on.
3 Come on. I'm being honest with you here, be honest
4 with me.

5 MR. ADAM GRACIA: I am.

6 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: What is your
7 number?

8 MR. ADAM GRACIA: I can't share that
9 at the moment.

10 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Of course you
11 can. Of course you can.

12 MR. ADAM GRACIA: However --

13 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Do you know
14 how much our homes are going to be devalued? Three
15 to five percent because of you putting your stuff
16 in, and we were never even consulted about this.

17 And you think this is funny, and you
18 as an attorney, you should know better than this.
19 This is going to a class action suit. It is.
20 Seriously.

21 You have -- you don't -- I just
22 don't understand how you -- how you believe we
23 don't deserve compensation for what you guys are
24 going to be making million of dollars on. Why is
25 that? You're part of the community; right? How do

1 we not deserve that? You even -- even suggested
2 that.

3 Answer? Nobody? No answers? You,
4 no answers?

5 MR. ADAM GRACIA: Sir, in our
6 application we did a market impact analysis looking
7 at -- specifically at property values across from
8 Minnesota solar projects. We've gone -- there was
9 no --

10 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Baloney. Look
11 it up online. You go online, do a Google search,
12 and it's right online.

13 I don't care what you -- what you
14 guys say your project came up with. It's right
15 online. This is ridiculous.

16 So my phone here, I have all my
17 neighbors on here. It says we are filing a class
18 action suit, send it. I just sent it. I'm not
19 dealing with you guys.

20 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Okay. Anybody else?
21 Yeah.

22 MR. JEFFREY REED: Hi. My name is
23 Jeffrey Reed. J-e-f-f-r-e-y, R-e-e-d. I live at
24 7634 R. Mitchel Court Northeast. It is a
25 development neighborhood adjacent to the project.

1 I just want to talk a little bit
2 about what it means to me and my family. I think
3 I'll just start with what we call our place. We
4 call it the Green Ranch. It's supposed to be the
5 place where we live forever. My son will be born
6 in a month from now, and I want to raise him there
7 and maybe have more kids too. It will be a dream
8 that this property stays in our family forever.

9 And it's an amazing place to live.
10 We love it. We've invested our lives and our
11 careers into this place. Our mortgage is a really
12 good decent payment. And, you know, the
13 development out there, these are really nice houses
14 and this -- and this is where we see ourselves. I
15 can't speak for everyone, of course, but my wife
16 and I, this project is harmful to us.

17 We -- we chose to build out there
18 because of the beautiful, pristine wilderness and
19 the wildlife, and we love -- we love the way it
20 looks as it is. We love the country feel of the
21 trees and -- and everything. And we certainly
22 didn't want or need an infrastructure like this to
23 be out there . It will impact us. We will see it
24 in our drive from and everywhere we go. We'll see
25 it when we're taking our dog out for a walk.

1 Yeah. So, I mean, it -- it's a big
2 deal, and I know everyone kind of feels this way
3 and it was a huge -- a huge surprise when this came
4 about.

5 Anyway, as far as some suggestions
6 here, I -- you know, my first preference would be
7 that it not take place at all or that it would be
8 far away from us, but with a company of this
9 stature and the interests of the government and the
10 capital gains here, it's probably going to happen;
11 right?

12 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: It's not going
13 to happen.

14 MR. JEFFREY REED: I hope not.

15 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: It's not going
16 to happen.

17 MR. JEFFREY REED: I certainly hope
18 not.

19 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: It's not going
20 to happen.

21 MR. JEFFREY REED: But installing
22 some kind of a fence, you know, a hill or a berm
23 with trees planted around impacted property owners
24 would be extremely reasonable and an absolute
25 expectation. I would be pretty disappointed in

1 government officials if something like that wasn't
2 expected of this -- this company.

3 And in addition to that, as this
4 gentleman mentioned, it's going to impact our
5 property's value. It just will. There's -- The
6 research that you're pointing out is illegitimate,
7 because if you were to be buying a property,
8 looking at one with a solar farm right next to it
9 versus one that doesn't have a solar farm right
10 next to it, that would be a definite con if you're
11 looking to buy a home. And so some type of
12 financial compensation seems more than fair, and my
13 first request would be that we weren't in that
14 situation at all.

15 But, yes, I hope that government
16 officials and -- and folks here protect us. And
17 I'm here -- I'm here just sharing my thoughts and
18 feelings, and I hope they're considered in the
19 ongoing development and management of this permit,
20 this project. Thank you.

21 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Thank you. Would
22 anybody else like to comment?

23 MS. TAMARA SELL: My name is Tamara
24 Sell, and we live in the old Gene Maleski
25 (phonetic) place, and we've been there for five,

1 almost six years, and chose it for some of the very
2 same reasons you did with your family. And I can
3 sympathize that you feel the same way. And also I
4 am part of the frustration and, frankly, anger that
5 this has been thrust upon us.

6 And I have some questions and things
7 today just to point out. In speaking with my
8 insurance agent today, those of you who have the
9 opportunity to have these panels on your land, you
10 will need to be insured, and insurance, which as we
11 all know, is a nightmare already, because of the
12 value of the equipment.

13 And I would like to know how this is
14 going to affect our taxes, which are already
15 extremely high. I'm concerned about the property
16 value decreasing, and if that's something that none
17 of you feel is going to be an issue, I would like
18 to see proof of that.

19 And I also do wonder with my whole
20 heart if any one of you would be willing to be in
21 this same situation and not be concerned if you
22 would be okay with parking your families right up
23 to whatever kind of radiation is going to be
24 emitted from these battery storage facilities. We
25 haven't heard anything about emissions or the

1 cadmium and lead that's going to be running in --
2 you know, run off into our soil and our water.

3 The impacts to our environment, which
4 is -- you know, I don't know how the deer hunters
5 are going to feel when there's no deer left.
6 There's birds and we have some God-awful turtle
7 that scares the heebie-jeebies out of me because he
8 lives in my back yard, and all of these kinds of
9 things.

10 I'm curious about what kind of
11 batteries are going to be used, like I said, and
12 the emissions.

13 I'd like to know how many of these
14 large energy plants exist. Do they exist in
15 Minnesota? A little bit more about the company
16 that's overseeing this project. And if these large
17 energy plants exist, do they usually come in
18 junction in with a battery storage facility; does
19 that exist. What have been some of the
20 ramifications of all of that.

21 I'm curious about the construction
22 jobs and who will employ them. Are these going to
23 be contractors or are they going to be employees of
24 the state? Who's going to be running around in my
25 front yard for the next year? I'd like to know.

1 We all have families and I think that could be a
2 safety issue as well.

3 And this road that we just paved with
4 our taxes to have done, is going to be where all of
5 these big cranes are coming through, and why did we
6 do it last summer if this is going to come through
7 and tear it up now. That doesn't make sense to me
8 either.

9 This \$200,000 tax benefit, is that
10 going to these people who have this equipment on
11 their land or -- or how is that going to be
12 allocated; you know, how that gets disbursed.

13 And I'm also curious, the -- the
14 people that did sign these leases, what -- it seems
15 to be a couple landowners that own a lot of these
16 parcels that got to make this even a possibility to
17 get pushed this far. So I'd like to know how
18 disbursement of that goes. If there is just one
19 landowner that owns the majority of these parcels,
20 if there's some sort of -- You know, we can find
21 out legal ways too, but --

22 MR. MICAH REVELL: Ma'am, if I can
23 just stop you for a second.

24 MS. TAMARA SELL: Sure.

25 MR. MICAH REVELL: We're happy to

1 answer those questions. We're having trouble
2 writing them all down.

3 MS. TAMARA SELL: Okay.

4 MR. MICAH REVELL: So maybe we can
5 take them in sequence. I think Adam has got the
6 majority of them, but maybe a refresher if we miss
7 some in responding. That would be helpful too.

8 MS. TAMARA SELL: Here you go. I've
9 never used one of these. Do I need to turn it off?

10 MR. LOGAN HICKS: No. You can just
11 set it down. Thank you.

12 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: I've got a
13 question. Michael again. Why this area? Why here
14 in a residential neighborhood? Why? There's
15 thousands and thousands of bare acres. Why?
16 Because of those guys right there? Because they --
17 they signed off? Is that what it was?

18 I mean, did you guys go like door to
19 door trying to find a spot for this project and
20 land on a few people that would sign off? I mean,
21 why this area? Why in a residential neighborhood?
22 Like that guy said, there's all kinds of brand-new,
23 beautiful homes built on the other side of the road
24 and you're going to destroy their lives, their home
25 values, and everything else. Why this area?

1 MR. ADAM GRACIA: So a couple of
2 factors go into site selection; all right. So one
3 of the --

4 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: No, no, no.
5 Don't -- don't go into the jargon. Why this area?
6 There's any kind of other area, anywhere in the
7 state of Minnesota, where there's nobody around
8 that you could have put this project. Why did you
9 choose this particular area?

10 MR. ADAM GRACIA: So this project was
11 sited here due to solar resource, so we anticipate
12 getting --

13 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Oh, so the sun
14 shines here. Solar resource, is that science?

15 MR. ADAM GRACIA: That's the first
16 factor. Minimizing environmental impacts,
17 having --

18 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: But you're not
19 minimizing environmental impacts here.

20 And you guy over here, how many birds
21 a year are killed by solar panels? Birds that fly
22 into solar panels, the hot -- the hot solar panels.
23 Have you looked that up?

24 MR. LOGAN HICKS: I can for you.

25 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Okay. Go ahead

1 and look it up.

2 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Okay. Right now?

3 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: And on top of
4 that, why this area?

5 MR. ADAM GRACIA: So another key
6 factor for the site location is the proximity to
7 the point of interconnection. So the Benton County
8 substation has capacity for the 100 megawatts of
9 solar that we're trying to construct. The half
10 mile transmission line --

11 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: So is Benton
12 County -- is Benton County the one that absolved
13 you guys into choosing this site? So, again, you
14 chose this site; correct?

15 MR. ADAM GRACIA: Yes, sir. The fact
16 that --

17 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Why? There's
18 all kinds of other properties everywhere else. Why
19 here? Why next to a residential neighborhood?
20 This is ridiculous.

21 And then not -- not to offer or talk
22 to anybody, just come in and like you're going to
23 fly under the radar until somebody blew this up,
24 and all of a sudden you guys had to have a meeting
25 here in front of us.

1 MR. ADAM GRACIA: No, sir, that was
2 not our intention. We had to --

3 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Oh, baloney.
4 It was too your intention because you did it that
5 way. That's how you did this. It was your
6 intention.

7 All of you, shame on you. Shame on
8 you. You're -- you're going to lose your smile.
9 Shame on you.

10 This is our neighborhood. This is
11 our properties. This is our livelihood. We have
12 hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars into
13 our properties. You guys will make millions and
14 millions and millions of dollars on your property
15 and you will give us nothing for that. That's
16 ridiculous.

17 And you, as an attorney, know exactly
18 where this is going. Exactly where this is going.
19 Shame on all of you.

20 MS. TAMARA SELL: I --

21 MR. ADAM GRACIA: Ma'am, I'd like to
22 answer your questions.

23 MS. TAMARA SELL: Okay. I do have
24 one last thing to add to my list and then I'll be
25 done.

1 I'm concerned about also that -- the
2 fire hazard or explosion risk of these -- these
3 control batteries. I know we had to pay extra for
4 being nine miles away from the fire station with a
5 cedar shake roof. So I know these -- this is
6 outside of that risk range.

7 And we've also replaced our roofs a
8 bunch of times. We get a lot of storms. Everybody
9 in Minnesota does. So are these -- are these
10 plants also -- is there an explosion risk if we
11 have lightning storms and storms like we've had in
12 this county for the last -- And -- and if they
13 blow, how -- how far -- how far is -- is the impact
14 of that?

15 MR. ADAM GRACIA: Thank you, ma'am.
16 Do you mind if I still go down the list that you
17 talked about here?

18 MS. TAMARA SELL: Yeah.

19 MR. ADAM GRACIA: So on the property
20 taxes, on your question, so the -- the taxes that
21 we're paying to the county is a solar production
22 tax for putting our infrastructure on that
23 property. So we are paying -- we make an annual
24 payment to the tax assessor for Benton County.
25 They -- however they use that tax dollars is just

1 how they would use property tax dollars.

2 So by putting this infrastructure on
3 there, we are adding to the tax base for Benton
4 County and Minden Township, so we don't expect any,
5 you know, impact or any increase on your property
6 taxes for what we're installing.

7 MS. TAMARA SELL: All right. All --

8 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Why -- why is
9 no one from Benton County here?

10 MR. ADAM GRACIA: Sorry?

11 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Why is no one
12 from Benton County here?

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You have three
14 of us back here. Four of us.

15 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Great.
16 Congratulations, guys.

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So we signed
18 declarations --

19 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: How close do
20 you live to this?

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I actually
22 live right in town here so.

23 MR. ADAM GRACIA: I'd like to --

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I live like
25 five blocks this way.

1 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Exactly.

2 COURT REPORTER: You can't have
3 people just talking --

4 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Sure. If we can
5 have the inner talking for after, you know, this is
6 done because this is all on the record and our
7 court reporter needs to make sure everything gets
8 on the record, please. Thank you.

9 MS. TAMARA SELL: And is that \$200,000
10 also, is that if --

11 COURT REPORTER: Please come up to
12 the podium if you're going to speak.

13 MR. ADAM GRACIA: I think your
14 question was, will that money go towards the roads
15 that are used for construction. I'll answer that
16 question now.

17 So, you know, prior to starting
18 construction, we're going to enter into a written
19 agreement with the county. We are going to assess
20 the status of the roads prior to bringing this
21 equipment on the road and the company will be
22 liable for any damages or upgrades that are
23 required to those roads to support our
24 construction.

25 I think your next question was on

1 construction jobs and who will employ them. So our
2 intention for this project is to use local union
3 labor for the project. We are in the process of
4 selecting a general contractor right now. That is
5 our intention for construction.

6 MS. TAMARA SELL: Do those
7 contractors -- (Court reporter is unable to hear
8 the comments.) So they will be contractors --

9 MR. ADAM GRACIA: For the
10 construction. So the full-time maintenance and
11 operation will be employees.

12 MS. TAMARA SELL: Okay.

13 MR. ADAM GRACIA: So your question
14 about large energy facilities. So NextEra Energy
15 Resources has been investing in Minnesota since
16 2000. Right now we have two operational wind sites
17 that are Lake Benton Wind and Walleye Wind. We
18 have one solar site, Marshall Solar, and one
19 battery storage site in the state of Minnesota.

20 You know, nationwide we employ --
21 nationwide we have over two gigawatts of battery
22 storage at 36 operational battery storage sites.

23 So we do have a lot of experience in
24 constructing and operating these sites safely and
25 effectively.

1 MS. TAMARA SELL: Have there ever been
2 any that have both of these capacities at the same
3 time? Are the solar and the battery typically
4 separate or do your other facilities have both of
5 them at the same time?

6 MR. ADAM GRACIA: That's a great
7 question. So we are starting to add battery
8 storage to some of our existing sites. So existing
9 wind sites are adding a battery storage side and
10 existing solar sites are adding battery storage. A
11 lot of projects now that we're developing are
12 projects that have solar and storage in conjunction
13 or wind and storage in conjunction.

14 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: So the answer
15 is no?

16 MS. TAMARA SELL: No.

17 MR. ADAM GRACIA: I'd have to get an
18 answer for you on that.

19 MS. TAMARA SELL: So this is an
20 experiment. This has never been done before? The
21 answer is no?

22 MR. ADAM GRACIA: That is -- that is
23 not true.

24 MS. TAMARA SELL: It could be. Okay.

25 MS. KELLIE KRAFT: Kellie Kraft from

1 part of our engineering construction team. We do
2 have some sites in our organization that are both
3 solar and energy storage. I do not have the exact
4 number for you, but there have been several already
5 constructed and in operation.

6 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: How large --
7 how large of sites? And is this site larger or
8 smaller?

9 MS. KELLIE KRAFT: Probably about this
10 size. It's --

11 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Probably?

12 MS. KELLIE KRAFT: I would have to
13 get the exact dimensions.

14 MS. TAMARA SELL: That would be
15 information that I think if it was true you would
16 have. And I would like -- I would like the names
17 and the location and the size of those, please, for
18 the record.

19 MR. ADAM GRACIA: And then in terms of
20 the types of battery and the hazards associated
21 with them, Josh, are you able to speak to that?
22 Josh Adams, he's our battery safety expert.

23 MR. JOSH ADAMS: Yeah, Josh Adams.
24 I'm the fire and safety expert for battery energy
25 storage.

1 So these are going to be a lithium
2 ion technology. These cells and systems go through
3 various levels of vigorous safety testing. So they
4 are all compliant with the National Fire Protection
5 Association, NFPA-855, which is the standard for
6 the installation of energy storage systems.
7 NFPA-855 further requires that all of the equipment
8 installed in energy storage facilities need to be
9 listed on UL-9540.

10 UL-9540 requires that all battery
11 energy storage systems be tested to 9540A.
12 UL-9540A is a method of forcing a worst case
13 scenario situation by actually causing an
14 environmental impact and analyzing how the system
15 does at isolating and containing those events.

16 And all of our systems have been
17 shown that in the event of runaway, they will be
18 isolated to the container in which they occurred.
19 They will not spread. They will not explode. They
20 will not put anybody in danger.

21 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: I have a
22 question for you. Michael again. Do I need to
23 stand up here?

24 Are these the same type of batteries
25 that burned up the cars on the ship that went down?

1 They lit the ship on fire and it went down in the
2 ocean. Are these the same type of batteries those
3 were that were guaranteed not to do that?

4 MR. JOSH ADAMS: I don't know exactly
5 what technology was on that ship, but those
6 were not operational energy storage systems that
7 have fire safety systems integral to their design.

8 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Our fire
9 department don't have any system to (inaudible).

10 MR. JOSH ADAMS: I'm not an expert on
11 cars.

12 MS. TAMARA SELL: And in these worst
13 case scenarios, what type of -- what type -- like
14 what is the -- what is the worst case scenario that
15 they're testing for? It can't be like everything.

16 MR. JOSH ADAMS: Well, they -- they
17 over spin it into a runaway. So they actually
18 force the worst case scenario to happen and then
19 they assess the design of the system and how well
20 that design prevents that worst case scenario from
21 spreading to the next cell, the next module, the
22 next container; right?

23 It analyzes what the overall results
24 are when the worst case scenario happens, right,
25 and so that's where these systems are designed and

1 tested to prove that in the event, in the rare
2 event of a runaway, you will not have any
3 propagation to any of the neighboring containers.
4 And then that way we just allow it to terminate
5 itself and we keep people safe as our top priority.

6 MS. TAMARA SELL: And that includes
7 the line that's associated with this as well? Is
8 that tested in the same way? What happens to the
9 line if there's an explosion?

10 MR. JOSH ADAMS: So the lines -- the
11 lines and all their connections get tested. So
12 that will be more under Rule 9540. It does require
13 that the installation of the lines be tested and
14 that they be tested for their short circuit
15 amperage. So they are all tested and analyzed for
16 safety.

17 So the testing for the lines would be
18 a different type of testing than what you would do
19 on the actual battery cells themselves because it's
20 not -- you know, you have a copper line versus, you
21 know, a cell, so they're going to react differently
22 in a worst case scenario, so they are tested
23 differently, but they all follow those vigorous
24 safety standards.

25 MS. TAMARA SELL: And these batteries

1 are all the same level as the other facilities that
2 you -- like more powerful or have more -- you know,
3 more storage units or --

4 MR. JOSH ADAMS: I mean, battery
5 technology is improving significantly as -- as
6 years go by, so technology is ever changing, but
7 with that is also the codes and standards that
8 regulate the safety testing and requirements for
9 all these batteries.

10 And so relative to, say, older
11 systems, these are going to be significantly safer
12 because they have a lot more safety standards, they
13 have a lot more regulations, as well as just
14 manufacturing processes have improved over time
15 just to make sure that these things are being
16 manufactured in a much more consistent, safer
17 manner.

18 MS. TAMARA SELL: Okay. And
19 emissions, what does that look like for
20 environmental, all of that?

21 MR. JOSH ADAMS: Well, I mean, as far
22 as during operation, there -- there are no
23 emissions. That's kind of the idea about it. It's
24 clean energy, it's green energy. There are --

25 MS. TAMARA SELL: There's no emissions

1 at all? No emissions?

2 MR. JOSH ADAMS: No. I mean,
3 basically a battery is a DC system, right, and
4 electromagnetic frequencies come from AC signals
5 and radiofrequencies, so you're going to have
6 communication devices on site, but that's no
7 different than what you already have existing in
8 electrical infrastructure that it has already right
9 now.

10 MS. TAMARA SELL: But we just don't
11 have this type of infrastructure in our private
12 homes, but now we're going to have infrastructure
13 that is significant and -- and maybe even hasn't
14 been done before. So do we know what they think
15 about EMFs and -- and how dangerous this could
16 potentially be?

17 MR. LOGAN HICKS: We actually have a
18 handout in the back there if you would like to read
19 about it.

20 MS. TAMARA SELL: I did. That's why
21 I asked the question.

22 MR. JOSH ADAMS: There's no -- there's
23 no risk of EMF. You're never going to get any more
24 EMF out of a battery versus the EMF that you're
25 going to get out of a substation.

1 MS. TAMARA SELL: So for the record,
2 no risk of EMFs from this project; right?

3 MR. JOSH ADAMS: There is -- there is
4 no risk to the surrounding areas of any EMF.

5 MS. TAMARA SELL: How far?

6 MR. JOSH ADAMS: I don't have an exact
7 number.

8 MR. LOGAN HICKS: If you have more
9 questions, we'll get to them. I just want to
10 scan --

11 MS. TAMARA SELL: That's okay.

12 MR. LOGAN HICKS: -- the rest of the
13 room to see if there's anybody else who would like
14 to speak.

15 Thank you. Make sure you state your
16 name for the record.

17 MR. MITCH LITFIN: My name is Mitch
18 Litfin. I live at 7635 R. Mitchel Court Northeast,
19 and like my neighbors, I'm not for your project,
20 but what I am asking for as a reasonable person is
21 that you mitigate the visual impact, because when
22 I look out my window right now, I have farm fields
23 and woods, and I don't want to see this; okay?

24 I've had dealings with you before and
25 you told my wife, that's unfortunate you chose to

1 live there. That's what you said to us in a
2 crowded room. So that shows --

3 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: They're part of
4 our community.

5 MR. MITCH LITFIN: And I am part of
6 the community. And I'm also asking that you give
7 all the fire departments in the area training and
8 you give them money for training; okay?

9 I also want to know, how much water
10 does it take to put one of those batteries out?
11 Let's say that whole thing gets on fire. How much
12 water does it take to put one out?

13 MR. JOSH ADAMS: This is Josh Adams
14 again. Zero, because we specifically advise the
15 fire departments to not apply water to a battery
16 energy storage system if it catches on fire.

17 MR. MITCH LITFIN: So how do you
18 terminate it?

19 MR. JOSH ADAMS: You allow it to
20 terminate itself. As I just explained, these
21 things are tested and contained in such a way that
22 it does not spread to any of the nearby containers.
23 So at that point we're not worrying about saving
24 the battery in that one container. The only thing
25 that we care about is the safety of the personnel

1 and the surrounding areas.

2 MR. MITCH LITFIN: Good. Okay. Thank
3 you. That's all I have.

4 MS. RACHEL STUCKEY: Hi. Good
5 evening. My name is Rachel Stuckey, and I am the
6 executive director of the Minnesota Conservative
7 Energy Forum and I'm appearing on behalf of this
8 organization and our program named the Land &
9 Liberty Coalition.

10 We operate in all 87 counties in the
11 state, and we're a statewide education nonprofit
12 organization and advocate for all of the above
13 market-based approach to energy, focusing on values
14 like affordability, property rights, personal
15 stewardship, and job growth.

16 And in general we support just
17 getting more energy on the grid. We can't do it
18 with all renewables. We can't do it with all of
19 what we have right now. We just want more energy
20 to stabilize the grid.

21 And so I can at least speak to a
22 couple of the questions that have come up just
23 through our work as a nonprofit. We're in the
24 field, as I said, in all the counties.

25 As far as the roads, a lot of times

1 companies actually improve the roads, if that makes
2 sense. So some of the township roads, you know,
3 are kind of older and that kind of thing --

4 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: We just got our
5 road improved. We just paid taxes to have our road
6 improved. We don't need the road past that
7 proposed site improved.

8 MS. RACHEL STUCKEY: Okay. So that's
9 fine. I'm just saying if the roads are damaged --

10 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: I'm just saying
11 the road is not damaged.

12 MS. RACHEL STUCKEY: In certain
13 counties, they are left better than they were
14 before.

15 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Perfect.

16 MS. RACHEL STUCKEY: Great. And then
17 townships and counties can also enter into road use
18 agreements actually as part of the project, and
19 we've seen counties drive a hard pardon with them.
20 And so from what we've seen, they worked really
21 well with -- with the local townships specifically
22 and counties to mitigate concerns and everything
23 so. And that's across multiple developments, too,
24 so different forms of energy. So yeah.

25 And then I think you asked about the

1 property -- or the tax impact. At least part of
2 it, I think they mentioned the production taxes,
3 80 percent, it all goes directly locally, which is
4 positive. But then 80 percent goes to the county
5 and 20 percent to the township. So that stays
6 right here.

7 And so we've seen counties too,
8 because of certain projects, be able to freeze
9 property taxes for a few years or invest in their
10 local buildings and infrastructure and parks and
11 that kind of thing.

12 So just wanted to address some of the
13 impacts. Thank you.

14 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Not once did
15 you express that you were a homeowner in all of
16 this, this little speech that you gave here. What
17 about the homeowners in all this? Everybody is
18 getting this, everybody is getting that. We aren't
19 getting nothing from you people. Nothing.

20 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Sir, if you could
21 come up.

22 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: No, I'm not
23 standing up there again. It's a silly little game
24 here.

25 We're getting nothing from you

1 people. Zero, except devalued properties and a
2 bunch of BS. That's all we're getting from you
3 guys period.

4 Four of my neighbors just called back
5 and filed on the suit, by the way, within the last
6 15 minutes.

7 You think this is funny, and you
8 little guy up there, and I believe his story what
9 you said to him, I do. I can see it in him. I see
10 it like I'm sitting here.

11 So whatever kind of malarky you guys
12 have going on and all you people sitting over here,
13 good luck to you all. Good luck to you all.

14 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Again, anybody else?

15 MR. ED POPP: I would just like to say
16 on behalf of Benton County that because this is
17 more than one megawatt, the county has no --

18 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Sir, could you state
19 your name, please?

20 MR. ED POPP: Oh, Ed Popp, Benton
21 County Commissioner.

22 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Thank you.

23 MR. ED POPP: The county has really
24 no say in this because the Public Utilities
25 Commission does this. This is actually the second

1 one that's gone in in Benton County. There's one
2 north of Rice on -- between Highway 110 and --

3 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: You -- you're
4 representing us in Benton County.

5 MR. ED POPP: Right.

6 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: You're not
7 representing them. Why in the hell are you rolling
8 over to them --

9 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Sir, I would just
10 like to ask that we have one speaker at a time.

11 MR. ED POPP: We didn't roll over.
12 They came to us at the beginning, and then when you
13 look at the process, there is not a lot that Benton
14 County can do except --

15 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Say no.

16 MR. ED POPP: No, we can't say no. We
17 cannot say no to that. We mitigate road damage.
18 We had a lot of questions for them when they came
19 about it.

20 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: They're still
21 here.

22 MR. ED POPP: This is the second
23 one -- the second process that I've been through.
24 The other one was up by Langola Township up north.
25 The same rules apply to both of them, that you

1 cannot -- local officials cannot say no to the
2 Public Utilities Commission, and I think you can
3 attest to that. We can --

4 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: How do you
5 call it public utilities when they're profiting off
6 of our lots? How can you call it public utilities?
7 We're getting nothing. We're getting nothing from
8 this.

9 MR. ED POPP: The Public Utilities
10 Commission, from what I understand, does not profit
11 from this.

12 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: They're not
13 profiting?

14 MR. ED POPP: They're not.

15 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: They make a
16 profit. Come on.

17 MR. ED POPP: These guys are from the
18 state and --

19 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: All these
20 people on payroll here wouldn't be sitting here if
21 there wasn't huge profits involved with this.

22 MR. ED POPP: Well, I don't know about
23 that, but there has to be -- there has to be a
24 process, and the process is controlled by the State
25 of Minnesota, the Public Utilities Commission, and

1 we do not have a say in it.

2 There is some benefits to the county
3 as you're seeing; you know, a couple hundred
4 thousand dollars, and the county will probably use
5 that for tax relief.

6 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Baloney.

7 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Sir, I'm going to
8 ask that you just -- you know, you have to please
9 be quiet at your seat. If you want to participate,
10 you're more than welcome to come up and speak on
11 the record but, I mean, you're injecting when
12 others are speaking.

13 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Am I not on
14 record? I'm on the record. Thank you.

15 MR. LOGAN HICKS: I would -- I would
16 prefer if you came up and --

17 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: I just don't
18 like this malarky going on where he stands up here
19 and tells us nobody is making money. These guys
20 are all sitting here, looking around, like you're
21 here for free. You're all here for free; right?

22 MR. ED POPP: I was just telling how
23 the county --

24 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Sure he was.

25 MR. ED POPP: They worked -- they

1 worked with us, the county, before they even
2 started, and from the research and the stuff that I
3 know, the Public Utilities Commission controls it.
4 It's not the county. It's not the Department of
5 Development.

6 And there is some benefits to the
7 county and to the township down the road and for
8 the next 45 years, you know, from what
9 I understand.

10 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: It benefits the
11 value of our properties? That's a benefit to us?

12 MR. ED POPP: The only way that it's
13 going to devalue your properties is if people sell
14 them and leave to a different area and the property
15 goes unsold.

16 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: We have to see
17 this for the rest of our lives now.

18 MR. ED POPP: I don't --

19 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: We have no
20 option. We shouldn't have moved there; right?

21 MR. ED POPP: No. That's -- that's --
22 I mean, the other part is that I think the county
23 board believes it's going on private property.
24 These people are getting a fair amount of rent per
25 acre.

1 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Sure they are.
2 Yep.

3 MR. ED POPP: And we're not in the
4 business of telling people that have owned this
5 property for, you know, 30, 40, 50 years, that you
6 can't do with your property what you want, and
7 that's kind of how it is.

8 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Really? So if
9 I want to put a pole barn up on my property, I have
10 to get permission from you guys; correct?

11 MR. ED POPP: Correct.

12 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: So how does
13 that impact my neighbor?

14 MR. ED POPP: Well, I --

15 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: How does that
16 impact my neighbor if I put a pole barn up?

17 MR. ED POPP: Well, we have the
18 Department of Development goals --

19 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Exactly.
20 Exactly. That doesn't -- that doesn't devalue
21 my neighbor's property.

22 MR. ED POPP: I was just trying to
23 explain where the county sits on this. We don't
24 want to have to tell property owners what they can
25 and can't do with their property. So if your

1 neighbor chooses to put up solar panels on there --

2 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: It's not --

3 MR. ED POPP: -- that's his right.

4 It's going to generate electricity. It's also
5 going to generate, you know, economic development
6 for the county and they'll spend the money
7 countywide, do different things that help the
8 economy of Benton County, but it's not part of the
9 county's say on whether we should do that so.

10 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: Okay. Let me
11 ask you one quick question then. What about --

12 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Sir, you can ask him
13 a question after.

14 MR. MICHAEL ODENTHAL: No, I want to
15 ask you about a feed lot. What about a feed lot?

16 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Hey, this is not
17 pertaining to the scoping or anything. This is
18 very much a different conversation, so we're going
19 to move on.

20 Is there anybody else who has any
21 comments, any questions, anything pertaining to the
22 environmental assessment that would like to come up
23 and put on the record?

24 Yes, come right up here.

25 MS. JACLYN LITFIN: Hello. Good

1 evening. My name is Jaclyn Litfin, L-i-t-f-i-n,
2 and I'm a resident within the rural area which this
3 solar field is going into.

4 I can certainly resonate and
5 understand all the different perspectives that
6 we're hearing tonight. I think you can tell
7 there's a lot of emotion from a lot of individuals,
8 and hopefully you can understand where we're all
9 coming from and the very heartfelt message that
10 we're sharing tonight.

11 Similar to what Mr. Reed has said,
12 Benton County is my home. You know, it's where I
13 chose to take root. You know, when we first came
14 out to our property before we built, I remember my
15 husband looking out and saying, hey, can you
16 picture it. You know, we're looking out over the
17 road and there's farm fields on all four sides of
18 our property.

19 You know, when I think about a
20 project like this, this is a 25- to 30-year
21 project. That's my lifetime in this home. You
22 know, we built this home to be our forever home,
23 and that will be pretty much the entirety of what,
24 you know, our active life be.

25 So just some of the things that I

1 want to be taken into consideration for the
2 environmental aspect of it. Environmental, you
3 know, it encompasses so many things. It's the air
4 quality, it's the free space, it's the roads around
5 us, it's the water, it's the soil. All those
6 different complexities, and each one of those has
7 an impact on our health.

8 I guess my concern -- my number one
9 concern is coming from, you know, I hear all the
10 research and the studies and the numbers being
11 thrown out, and I appreciate that and thank you for
12 bringing that information. But my other concern is
13 that, you know, there's really not a lot of
14 long-term studies about the new technology to
15 really tell us 30 years from now, you know, if I
16 stay in my home and I'm within whatever radius that
17 you say is safe today, is there going to be
18 long-term health impacts from that. So my concern
19 is, we just don't know.

20 And -- and I think you guys have
21 comfortably said that. From what I was reading, a
22 lot of it says researchers are still looking into
23 this. We're still looking at these studies if
24 there is an actual cause and effect relationship.
25 We're still looking for more than just a weak

1 association; right?

2 So the reality is, we don't know
3 those long-term effects, and I'm really hoping when
4 you're doing your environmental assessment and when
5 you're considering mitigation strategies, that some
6 of those things that you're thinking about would be
7 increased distances from that residential area.

8 You know, there aren't -- when you
9 look at the map, as far as our houses are, there's
10 a lot of space that you could maybe avoid
11 putting it. You know, maybe it's underground wires
12 and it's not the -- the overhead wires. You know,
13 is there increased distancing that you can do for
14 the sake of being good neighbors to all of us that
15 are living within this neighborhood and knowing
16 that, you know, you really don't know and you
17 really can't say with 100 percent accuracy that we
18 won't have some type of impact.

19 You know, we've heard some people
20 talk about the fire, you know, concerns, and I hear
21 what you're saying with the technology, but I know
22 in your application it talks about emergency action
23 planning around fires.

24 We know locally there have been a few
25 fires in the fields around us, and so those are

1 really important considerations that we're worried
2 about as a neighborhood. Wild fires across the
3 nation and the impact of smoke and dust that we're
4 experiencing and the risk to air quality in our
5 area.

6 The other thing I'm wondering about
7 and we haven't talked about is in doing some of the
8 research, they talk a lot about some of the hot
9 spots of solar panels and solar fields have caused,
10 and in a lot of studies, you know, from Germany
11 where solar is widely spread, and you see an
12 increase in temperature around that local area.
13 You know, just being considerate about that, you
14 know.

15 And I've heard some of the others
16 speak about, we need to go for walks, we've got
17 gardens, we -- we enjoy our green spaces. We moved
18 there for that reason. And so, you know, if we're
19 talking about long-term environmental impacts, is
20 that something we should be worried about and have
21 we looked at that in -- in our area.

22 I'm just thinking about, you know,
23 again, it's not really just the visual nuisance.
24 If you think about that environment again, it
25 really is a way of life, it's not just the

1 aesthetics. It's our livelihood. You know, again,
2 it's where a lot of us have built our homes. We're
3 really invested in our local community, and I think
4 what we're really asking, the bottom line is,
5 hopefully you guys will be good neighbors to us.
6 We're neat and tidy and clean. We're expected to
7 not have piles of debris around, all kinds of
8 different things, but we're hoping that that can be
9 reciprocated by you coming into our community and
10 being a good neighbor with us and working with us
11 as well.

12 I think some of the others have
13 mentioned, you know, some of the different modes of
14 covering it. You know, it can't be avoided and
15 you've got to have these panels, how are you going
16 to shield them from all of us? And really, can you
17 build a bridge, a high bridge, and put tall pine
18 trees that will fully block our view.

19 You know, as I mentioned when all
20 phases of this project is done, our cul-de-sac will
21 be surrounded, you know, so no matter which window
22 I look out, that's what our view will be, and that
23 was not the view that we envisioned when we got
24 engaged on our property and then married during
25 COVID on our property, and we're expecting to live

1 the rest of our lives on our property. So I'm
2 hoping that that can be another mitigation effort.

3 You know, thinking about how the
4 environment impacts our health, not always just
5 from a data standpoint. Sometimes it's more about
6 a life experience too that perhaps drastically
7 impacts our health and how those things that you're
8 not capturing impact us.

9 Similar to what some of the others
10 have mentioned, you know, the home value. I think
11 that's a big hot topic and I think there's data on
12 both sides; right? But one of the things that is
13 important to remember is, data is generated on
14 things that have happened, and if you -- but if
15 something doesn't happen, so to speak, you know, if
16 people aren't looking to purchase homes in our area
17 in Benton County because they know there's solar
18 fields there, it's almost impossible for you to
19 capture the number of people who didn't look to
20 move to our community because it never happened.
21 They never were able to tell you they were looking
22 because they never looked. So just keeping that in
23 mind again.

24 You know, I think I even asked at the
25 county presentation, you know, how many of you

1 would choose to live here, and nobody mentioned
2 that they would like to do that knowing that the
3 solar fields are going there and having to live
4 with that.

5 And so hopefully you're keeping those
6 things in mind in ways of shielding, so that when
7 we do, if we ever do choose to move, or if others
8 want to move into our community, it looks nice and
9 people want to move into our area and bring more to
10 our community.

11 I think there's a couple of
12 questions, you know, about the things that you
13 noted in your emergency action plan. You had
14 talked about, you know, during the construction
15 phase, high amounts of dust and things like that.
16 So, again, just asking for a lot of mitigation
17 around those things, you know, just from air
18 quality perspectives.

19 In looking at some of the numbers
20 that you had put into your document, it looks like
21 there's quite a bit of different things that are
22 going on during the time of construction,
23 especially with a lot of traffic.

24 And I will say, too, I know -- again,
25 I appreciate the space and the time for you all in

1 setting up this platform to express our concerns as
2 well.

3 The only thing I wanted to mention
4 is, I wasn't -- I was wondering about the
5 environmental assessment, when it's done, how do we
6 get a copy of that? Is that something that will be
7 mailed out to the neighbors so we can provide
8 feedback at that time or where does that get saved?

9 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Yes. So that
10 actually will be put on the record, on edockets,
11 which, if you pick up the slides that we have
12 presented over there, there's a link on there for
13 edockets, and you just type in any of those --
14 23-423, 24-238 -- or 283, and 23-425. Just put in
15 any of those and it will be in that docket.

16 But if you would like to be on the
17 mailing list, you can -- you can put your -- fill
18 out that card there and leave it with either me or
19 Cezar, and then you will be -- they will let you
20 know when it's available so you can go and read it
21 and, you know, take a look. And then once we
22 have -- we'll have a public hearing so you guys can
23 come together and say, hey, we like that you did
24 this but you missed this. So you'll have a chance
25 to comment again after the environmental assessment

1 is posted.

2 MS. JACLYN LITFIN: And I guess that
3 was my next question. So what is the next couple
4 of steps? You mentioned a couple of other public
5 hearings. So is there a PCA public hearing or is
6 it set here? Mr. Popp had mentioned some other
7 processes, so how do we find out about those things
8 so we can have that on our radar as well?

9 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: I can answer that.
10 The Pollution Control Agency, they won't be on this
11 project unless there is some type of risk to the
12 water or air quality. So these projects are
13 reviewed as part of the Public Utilities
14 Commission's review process, which is what we are
15 doing here tonight, and also part of the comment
16 period. And after the EA comes out, the people
17 will have a chance to review that and -- and
18 provide comments.

19 So there's a public hearing, which is
20 another department meeting in August, members of
21 the public will have an opportunity to again ask
22 questions about the environmental review, about any
23 other comments that they feel that they would like
24 to bring up, and that will be before the judge. So
25 the judge will take all into account, and the

1 Department of Commerce is required to provide
2 answers to any questions that pertain to any
3 shortcomings or any -- any deficiencies in the
4 environmental -- in the EA, and then, as the case
5 may be, issue some supplemental pages to the
6 environmental assessment or provide specific
7 answers to the -- to the -- to the people who ask.

8 MS. JACLYN LITFIN: But is there a
9 date set for that?

10 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Right now we don't
11 have a date. It will be sometime in August. But
12 the Department will be doing all of this, so we
13 will be sending out at least a notice ten days out
14 a similar notice --

15 MS. JACLYN LITFIN: Okay.

16 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: -- on how to
17 participate and where -- where the meeting will
18 be -- will be held.

19 MS. JACLYN LITFIN: Okay. And then
20 where -- I guess -- I guess my other follow-up
21 question is, just from the comments from people
22 that are here now, has McFerrell (phonetic) thought
23 about the landscaping? I mean, it's not something
24 that we've really been talking about. We've had a
25 couple of conversations. So is there any update on

1 that, where conversations have gone on around that
2 for the neighborhood?

3 MR. ADAM GRACIA: Yeah. So we are
4 developing a visual screening plan for the project.
5 Our -- you know, we'll work on the Benton County
6 ordinance that deals within 10,000 feet of the
7 panels, and then the ordinance requires either a
8 berm, fence, or landscaping with some combination.

9 So the exact mitigation, we have not
10 finalized that yet, but we are assessing that. And
11 specifically for where your property is located,
12 there will be screening there.

13 MS. JACLYN LITFIN: And kind of like
14 we had mentioned, we don't expect that you're going
15 to do the entire project, right, but at least that
16 area. I'm hoping that you would even consider
17 going above and beyond what the bare minimum is,
18 because, again, if you consider my lifetime, just
19 on my ride home today and I'm driving down 23 to
20 get here straight from work, I'm going to be
21 looking at those solar fields on both sides of the
22 road and the pine trees that are about this tall
23 and half of them dead, that's going to take 30
24 years before they cover any visual impact that it
25 will have to me in my lifetime. So hopefully you

1 can also take that feedback as well and designate
2 some dollars from the requests from the neighbors
3 and the neighborhood, who will be your neighbors as
4 you develop the project.

5 So, again, as you said, you know, as
6 you think about that environmental health, please
7 consider all those impacts to health, not just
8 those ones that we can see in some of the numbers
9 and sometimes we can't capture the numbers, and
10 please just do what's right for us in our
11 neighborhood as well.

12 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Does anybody else
13 have any comments or questions?

14 MS. TAMARA SELL: You had mentioned
15 just now that there is going to be a notice sent
16 out ten days before the next hearing. Is that --
17 is that going to go out like ten days prior to when
18 it actually takes place?

19 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: A minimum of ten
20 days. We try to get it out even before.

21 MS. TAMARA SELL: But it's seven to
22 ten business days, so we might not -- if you mail
23 it ten days before it's going to happen, we might
24 not get it. Is there another source that we can
25 find out when that date would be so we can just

1 kind of keep track?

2 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Yes. Yes. So
3 besides -- besides mailing out the notice to the
4 landowners, besides mailing out the actual notice
5 of the hearing, we also post it on the same day as
6 the executive secretary signs it. We post it in
7 edockets.

8 So people are strongly invited to
9 go -- to go to edockets and you can see the latest,
10 including any notifications about the upcoming
11 meetings.

12 MS. TAMARA SELL: Okay. Perfect. And
13 will all of this be on that site too? Will all the
14 transcripts and video of this meeting tonight be on
15 there too or where do we find that?

16 MR. LOGAN HICKS: We will be posting
17 the transcripts on edockets as well, the court
18 reporter's transcript. There's no video. This is
19 not being recorded. She is just taking down the
20 written testimony.

21 MS. TAMARA SELL: Okay. Perfect.
22 Thank you.

23 MR. MICAH REVELL: And I'll just add
24 one procedural thing to what Cezar said. When
25 there's a notice that goes out with that, that

1 notice also provides notice about the meeting, the
2 hearing that will take place. Those typically,
3 although it's not required, they typically will go
4 out 25 to 30 days before the meeting takes place.

5 So all of the subscriptions that
6 Cezar mentioned will be in the month range prior to
7 that hearing.

8 MR. LOGAN HICKS: All right. Any
9 other comments, questions? Over there.

10 MS. RACHEL STUCKEY: Just one last --
11 Rachel Stuckey again. I know it's one thing coming
12 from the department or the developer to get your
13 feedback and stuff, but just seeing a lot of these
14 go through and everything, like actually make sure
15 to share your feedback and concerns and everything
16 like that with your local county, because even
17 though the ultimate decision is with the Public
18 Utilities Commission, the local county does still
19 have a voice in it and they can negotiate with the
20 developer, and the PUC really wants to hear from
21 you too. So just make sure that you actually weigh
22 in. The public input is important.

23 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Did you get that?
24 Thank you. Like I said, if you don't have anything
25 else to say tonight, you can always write something

1 down, e-mail it to me. Write it down over there on
2 paper, e-mail it, leave it here. You know, there's
3 plenty of ways to get your comments to me and, you
4 know, I take all sorts so.

5 I'm not seeing any more hands, so I
6 think we're probably going to call it unless you
7 guys have anything else.

8 All right. Well, thank you guys very
9 much for coming. We really appreciate your time.
10 Look for that environmental assessment announcement
11 and for the next hearing date. Thank you very much
12 and drive safe.

13
14 (Proceedings concluded at 7:34 p.m.)

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1 SCOPING AND INFORMATIONAL MEETING - 23-423 24-283 23-425

2 Webex - January 15, 2025 - 6:00 p.m.

3 BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

4 AND DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

5
6 In the Matter of the Application of Benton Solar, LLC,
7 for a Site Permit for the 100 MW Solar Energy Generating
8 System for the Benton Solar Project in Benton County,
9 Minnesota

10 In the Matter of the Application of Benton Solar, LLC,
11 for a Site Permit for the 100 MW Battery Energy Storage
12 System for the Benton Solar Project in Benton County,
13 Minnesota

14 In the Matter of the Application of Benton Solar, LLC,
15 for a Route Permit for a 115 kV High-Voltage Transmission
16 Line Associated with the Benton Solar Project in Benton
17 County, Minnesota

18 MPUC DOCKET NO. IP7115/GS-23-423
19 IP7115/ESS-24-283
20 IP7115/TL-23-425

21 Meeting held remotely via:

22 Webex and Telephone

23
24 January 15, 2025

25 COURT REPORTER: Christine Simons, RMR, RPR

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1 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Okay. So good
2 evening, everyone. My name is Cezar Panait. I'm an
3 engineer with the Public Utilities Commission in
4 St. Paul, Minnesota, and we are meeting tonight on
5 the application of Benton Solar, LLC, for a -- for
6 three permits, actually, to construct and operate
7 their Benton Solar project.

8 So we have three permits that they have
9 applied for. One is for the site permit for the
10 solar facility, and that is filed in Docket
11 GS-23-423. The other permit is for a site permit
12 also for the energy storage system associated with
13 the Benton Solar project, and that is the docket
14 ESS-24-283. And there's also an associated short
15 transmission line to serve both of these projects,
16 and that has been filed for a route permit in Docket
17 TL-23-425.

18 It is January 15th, 2025, and we had a
19 similar meeting last night in Sauk Rapids,
20 Minnesota. The meeting was in person. This is a
21 public information and environmental assessment
22 scoping meeting. So the purpose of the meeting is
23 twofold: To provide information about the permit
24 review application that is being conducted by the
25 Minnesota Public Utilities Commission. We also will

1 be hearing some detail specifications about the
2 project and construction timeline from the
3 applicant, Benton Solar, LLC, which is a subsidiary
4 of NextEra Energy Resources. And then, lastly,
5 we'll be hearing from my colleague from the
6 Department of Commerce, Logan Hicks, and he will
7 talk about the role that the Department plays in
8 this permit review process.

9 Today's -- tonight's meeting agenda has
10 only four points, and so I'll be talking about -- I
11 already made the introduction, and I'll briefly talk
12 more about the permit application review process
13 that the Public Utilities Commission is conducting
14 on these three applications.

15 There will be a description of the
16 project by Benton Solar, LLC. The Department will
17 talk about their roles, and the last thing will be
18 taking questions and comments from members of the
19 public. Questions about any topics that may pertain
20 to the project, and, also, the important piece,
21 seeking feedback from the members of the public and
22 any agencies, local government units that may be
23 participating, on the scope of the environmental
24 assessment. And Logan will be leading that question
25 and answer session hopefully.

1 So there are three government units that
2 are being -- involved with this review, the review
3 of the permit applications. First of all, so Benton
4 Solar submitted three -- two applications: A joint
5 site permit for the solar and for the storage
6 system, and, separately, they submitted a route
7 permit application for the transmission line.

8 The role of the Commission: The
9 Commission manages the application review process,
10 and issues site and route permits for large energy
11 facilities in Minnesota, as delegated by the
12 legislature in applicable statutes and
13 administrative rules.

14 We also have the Department of Commerce
15 participating, and the Department of Commerce, their
16 staff will be preparing and conducting the
17 environmental documents for the project. And in
18 this case, that document is called an environmental
19 assessment.

20 And later on, during next summer, we will
21 have an Administrative Law Judge from the Office of
22 Administrative Hearings, and that judge will be
23 conducting a series of one public hearing in August
24 in Sauk Rapids and, also, will be conducting the
25 evidentiary hearing to further develop the record.

1 And following that public hearing, the
2 judge will be compiling and writing a report titled
3 Findings of Fact, Conclusions -- Fact, Conclusions
4 of Law and Recommendations, and the judge will be
5 submitting the report to the Commission. Which
6 takes the report and uses the report, along with the
7 complete record that will be developed by that time,
8 to deliberate and make a decision on issuing or
9 denying the permit applications that have been
10 applied for.

11 So the proposed project is comprised of a
12 100-megawatt solar generating system, there will be
13 100-megawatt battery energy storage, and the entire
14 project is proposed to be located on 632 acres of
15 private land, out of a larger 951-acre project site
16 located about six miles east of the city of
17 St. Cloud, Minnesota, in Benton County.

18 The project will also include a project
19 substation and interconnection facilities that would
20 connect this project to the power grid through an
21 existing Great River Energy power substation located
22 in Benton County. And that transmission line is
23 115-kilovolt, and also -- and about a half-mile in
24 length.

25 So I already mentioned about the permits

1 that were applied for. So the project qualifies,
2 meets the definition of a large electric power
3 generating plant, and requires a site permit for the
4 solar site because the solar project is greater than
5 50 megawatts.

6 It also requires a site permit, a
7 separate site permit, for the battery energy storage
8 because the energy storage is greater than 10
9 megawatts as defined in the definition of large
10 energy facilities as applicable to -- specifically
11 to battery energy storage.

12 And the route permit, it will be required
13 for the transmission line because the line will be
14 operating at a voltage of more than 100 kilovolts,
15 and the length of the line is greater than
16 1,500 feet in length.

17 It used to be that a project of this
18 magnitude would also require a certificate of need,
19 but the legislative law changed last year in the
20 2024 session, and renewable energy projects, such as
21 solar or wind, are excluded from requiring the
22 certificate of need.

23 So the Commission, after the entire year
24 review process, the public review process, the
25 Commission is tasked by the legislature, by the

1 applicable statute and rules, and, namely, the
2 factors are here -- listed here on this slide are
3 taken from Minnesota Rule 7850.4100. And these four
4 bullet points are not -- the number one factor that
5 the Commission is tasked to look at and consider is
6 the potential human and environmental impacts of a
7 project of this size.

8 For example, impacts could be associated
9 with noise or aesthetics; or public health and
10 safety and land-use conflicts; any cultural or
11 historic resources present in the project area.
12 But, also, whether the project affects, or not, the
13 air and water quality, and also the impact on plants
14 and wildlife.

15 Also, a consideration to look for
16 suitable ways to minimize, mitigate, and avoid any
17 identified impacts. Electrical system reliability
18 as a net -- in totality for the region and for the
19 State of Minnesota is also being considered by the
20 Commission when making a determination whether to
21 grant permits for energy facility projects such as
22 this Benton Solar.

23 And not the least is the cost, the cost
24 of the project, the cost of constructing; any jobs
25 created during construction and operations; any

1 maintenance facilities that are required for the
2 project; and how those costs are -- how much they
3 add up to. Because, ultimately, the project will be
4 paid by the electricity customers in the state or
5 nearby states.

6 So on this slide we have a tentative
7 schedule for the remaining review process. So just
8 reminding that the permit applications were
9 submitted by the applicant last fall in September of
10 2024. And then the Commission, after we conducted
11 the comment period, we took comments from members of
12 the public and agencies about the completion of the
13 permit applications. Because, by statute and by
14 rules, the applications need to touch on a number of
15 information, like the data points that the applicant
16 is required to provide, and that's why the
17 applications are quite extensive in printed format.

18 So the Commission met in an open agenda
19 meeting, and they deemed the applications as
20 complete in December -- on December 19th, and that
21 was the starting point, that the review process
22 actually begins when the applications are deemed
23 complete by the Commission's written order.

24 So yesterday and today, we were meeting
25 for the public information and scoping meetings.

1 Those are the second item on the -- in the table.
2 The comment period associated with this -- with
3 these two meetings will end on March [sic] 31st,
4 2025.

5 Following that, the Department will be
6 issuing the scope of their environmental assessment,
7 and then the environmental document sometime in
8 July. And then we'll have -- we'll have at least
9 three public hearings: An in-person one; a virtual,
10 similar to this format; and also an evidentiary
11 hearing in St. Paul, Minnesota.

12 Following the public hearings, the judge
13 will be issuing a report in November of 2025. And
14 within 60 days of that issuance of the report, the
15 Commission will meet one more time in an open format
16 meeting, and deliberate and decide on whether to
17 issue the permits that are being requested by the
18 applicant. And that will be roughly a year after
19 the applications were completed -- deemed complete.

20 So I already mentioned about the comment
21 period. That concludes on Friday, January 31st.
22 Please try to provide your comments by that date.
23 We would prefer by 4:30 p.m. And there are a couple
24 of ways to provide comments. So one of the ways is
25 to follow the web address listed -- and it also was

1 part of the notice for the meeting -- and provide
2 comments directly to the Department of Commerce.
3 And Logan will be receiving those comments and
4 organizing them and addressing each one of them.
5 You could also submit written comments by U.S. mail
6 addressed to Logan Hicks at the Department of
7 Commerce, and his address, work address, is listed
8 here on the page.

9 In providing comments, please be mindful
10 that the Commission is only interested to find out
11 some of those impacts that we talked about earlier,
12 about any potential human or environmental impacts
13 that a project such as Benton Solar might have on
14 the surrounding areas. Also, if you know of ways to
15 avoid or mitigate or minimize those perceived or
16 identified impacts. And, also, is there any unique
17 characteristics that the project should be -- should
18 be considering?

19 And the Commission is always mindful
20 about comments received from members of the public
21 and also from local government units. And in many
22 instances, the Commission does include some special
23 conditions, namely, to address those pertinent
24 comments that are received during the review
25 process.

1 So more information about the project:
2 The Department has a specific website to -- for
3 people to find out more details about this
4 project -- specific project. And, also, I would
5 like to remind that -- people that have a tendency
6 to want to know everything about the project, they
7 can certainly do that by looking up information
8 yourself on -- in eDockets, which is the
9 Commission's electronic filing system.

10 And once you go to that web address,
11 which is MN.gov/PUC, then you select "eDockets."
12 And then you enter the docket numbers: 23-423, or
13 you could enter 23- -- 24-238 for the storage and
14 23-425 for the transmission line.

15 You could also add your name to a mailing
16 list subscribing to this document in particular, to
17 any of these three documents, and you could receive
18 e-mail notifications every time a new document has
19 been eFiled. You'll go into the eDockets and find
20 out what that document that just arrived is about.

21 So the state agency contacts: So the
22 environmental review analyst from the Department is
23 Logan Hicks, and he will be introducing himself. I
24 am a facilities planner with the Minnesota Public
25 Utilities Commission. And also we have a designated

1 public advisor, Jacques Harvieux. He could not be
2 here tonight, but he is the public advisor tasked
3 with being able to help out any member of the public
4 or anybody that has a question about the process,
5 how to participate, when is the comment period
6 ending, when is the next opportunity to participate
7 in the public meeting about this project, and any
8 questions about the process and procedure.

9 At this point, I think we are at the
10 point to hand it over to the applicant, Benton
11 Solar, LLC, represented by people from NextEra
12 Energy Resources. So Adam or Micah, please go
13 ahead.

14 MR. MICAH REVEL: Thank you, Cezar. Can
15 you hear us alright?

16 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Yes, I can.

17 MR. MICAH REVEL: Great. Okay.

18 Well, thanks. Good evening, everyone.
19 My name is Micah Revel. I am an attorney at the
20 Stinson law firm here in Minneapolis, and I serve as
21 outside permitting counsel to NextEra Energy
22 Resources and to Benton Solar, LLC, which is the
23 applicant in this proceeding. I am surrounded by
24 members of the Benton Solar team, a lot of
25 subject-matter experts that are here and available

1 to answer specific questions.

2 Adam Gracia is the project developer and
3 the lead on this. He's going to be presenting on
4 the specifics of the project, so I'll turn it over
5 to him.

6 MR. ADAM GRACIA: Thanks, Micah.

7 As Micah mentioned, my name is Adam
8 Gracia. I'm a senior project manager with NextEra
9 Energy Resources and the developer for the Benton
10 Solar project.

11 So tonight we want to give you a quick
12 overview of who we are as a company, and then an
13 overview of the project, which will include the
14 project timeline, some of the benefits of the
15 project. I'll show you a site plan for the solar
16 and battery storage site, as well as the
17 transmission line.

18 And then we'll dive into some project
19 specifics for the solar project, the transmission
20 line, and the energy storage system. And then last,
21 but not least, we'll cover some stakeholder outreach
22 that we've done for the project.

23 So Benton Solar, LLC, is wholly-owned
24 indirect subsidiary of the NextEra Energy Resources,
25 or NEER. NEER is the largest generator of renewable

1 energy from the wind and the sun. We're also an
2 industry leader in battery storage. So NextEra
3 Energy has constructed -- or developed and
4 constructed over 40 co-located solar and storage
5 projects, ranging from 60 megawatt hours to over
6 900 megawatt hours. And, again, this project is
7 comprised of a solar generating facility, a battery
8 energy storage system, and a transmission line.

9 So this project is located entirely in
10 Benton County, Minnesota, specifically in Minden
11 Township, and includes the three components that we
12 talked about. So the solar generating facilities
13 will generate 100 megawatts of clean, renewable
14 energy. The energy storage system will -- it's a
15 100-megawatt, four-hour energy storage system. Said
16 differently, it can store 400 megawatt hours of
17 clean, renewable energy generated by the solar
18 system, as well as from the grid.

19 Both the solar facilities and the battery
20 energy storage facilities will share a half-mile
21 115-kilovolt transmission line that connects our
22 facilities to the GRE Benton County substation. Our
23 transmission line is located entirely on private
24 easements, and we will not be utilizing any public
25 right-of-way for the transmission line.

1 Here is a brief overview of the project
2 timeline. So we submitted our application on
3 September 20th, 2024. December 19th, it was deemed
4 complete. Our next major step in the development
5 process as we go through permitting is to procure
6 our major equipment, which will happen in the third
7 quarter of this year.

8 By the end of the year, we anticipate
9 having a decision from the Public Utilities
10 Commission on the project, which would then lead to
11 starting construction in the second quarter of 2026.
12 It's about a 14-month construction period with a
13 winter break, so we would be operational by the end
14 of the year 2027.

15 So there are a wide range of benefits
16 associated with this project. It is a significant
17 capital investment in Benton County. So the solar
18 and storage projects are over a \$300 million
19 investment in the county. During the construction
20 period that I mentioned in 2026, 2027, there'll be
21 between 150 and 300 construction job opportunities.
22 There will also be two to three full-time operations
23 jobs to maintain and operate the site. So they'll
24 be full-time NextEra Energy Resources employees.
25 There'll be increased businesses during the --

1 increased local business during the construction
2 period, as well as annual ongoing compensation for
3 the participating landowners.

4 Some other community-wide benefits will
5 come from the annual production tax that the -- that
6 Benton Solar, LLC, will pay to Benton County and to
7 Minden Township. So we anticipate approximately
8 \$200,000 per year to Benton County and \$50,000 per
9 year to Minden Township.

10 Battery storage projects provide great
11 stability and reliability. We'll go a little bit
12 more into that on some later slides. And, then, we
13 also want to -- over the past couple years, we've
14 been contributing to local organizations, and that's
15 something we want to continue to do throughout the
16 entire life of the project.

17 So here's our preliminary site plan. So
18 on the left is the solar and battery storage
19 facilities. The battery energy storage facilities
20 are the orange box to the southwest of the project.
21 On the right side of the slide is the preliminary
22 design for our transmission line. So, again, that
23 is a half-mile transmission line from our project's
24 collector substation to Great River Energy's Benton
25 County substation.

1 So the Benton Solar project will generate
2 up to 100 megawatts of clean, renewable energy. The
3 site will utilize approximately 600 acres for the
4 photovoltaic panels, access roads, and the collector
5 substation. We'll be using a tracking technology
6 for the solar panels, meaning that the direction
7 that the panels face throughout the day will shift
8 to track the sun and increase the efficiency of the
9 project.

10 All the panels are connected via
11 underground buried medium-voltage collection lines
12 of 34.5 kilovolts. These lines serve to carry all
13 the power generated from the panels to our collector
14 substation. At the collector substation, the power
15 is stepped up to 115 kilovolts, and then transmitted
16 via our transmission line to the Benton County
17 substation.

18 So the battery energy storage has a wide
19 range of benefits. So it helps optimize the way the
20 power grid delivers electricity to the customers; it
21 can smooth out fluctuations in frequency and
22 voltage; reduces energy losses and waste, both for
23 this project and for the grid as a whole.

24 It also avoids the need for some major
25 system upgrades, which could include larger

1 transmission projects, and it extends the hours that
2 our renewable energy project can operate. So the
3 solar system can charge the battery while the sun is
4 up, and then the battery can discharge that clean,
5 renewable energy to the grid after the sun goes
6 down.

7 So like I mentioned, the battery energy
8 storage facility, it delivers power when it's
9 needed. The general construction is, it has --
10 contains small battery cells that are assembled into
11 racks, and all those racks are filled into battery
12 containers. So this project will have approximately
13 176 battery containers for 100-megawatt four-hour
14 storage system.

15 So, yeah, it can store energy during low
16 energy demand periods, which we can charge the
17 battery and then discharge the battery when energy
18 demand is higher. Again, this works really well
19 with our solar facility.

20 And this is also a long-term investment.
21 So we anticipate the life of the battery project to
22 be up to 25 years.

23 So safety is a big part of what goes into
24 the design and construction of these systems. So
25 we'll incorporate the latest National Fire

1 Protection Association and Underwriters Laboratory
2 standards. These are new codes and standards that
3 address fire risks and mitigation, including, you
4 know, setbacks and detection, and our first
5 responder orientation and site-specific safety
6 plans.

7 So we've completed our first responder
8 orientation, coordinated that with the Benton County
9 emergency management department last year. Which,
10 basically, gave an overview of the battery storage
11 system, the general overview of the fire safety that
12 goes with it, and then that will be followed up with
13 a site-specific safety plan after construction.

14 We also have a remote monitoring system
15 in place. So we have a remote operations control
16 center, which provides 24/7 monitoring for all of
17 our sites nationwide. This can detect any change in
18 operation of a single cell within a battery storage
19 system and alert our operators as necessary.

20 So safety is our number one priority.
21 Safety of employees, neighbors, and the public are
22 always top of mind. So, again, that starts with the
23 industry testing prior to them procuring the
24 equipment, the safety systems that we put in place
25 during construction and operation, the 24/7

1 detection that I talked about -- detection and
2 monitoring, and then, again, that ongoing engagement
3 with first responders.

4 So the solar -- solar system and the
5 battery storage system will connect to the grid via
6 a half-mile 115-kilovolt transmission line. Again,
7 this is all on private easements, utilizing
8 approximately seven single-circuit monopole
9 structures. The actual height and pole placement
10 will vary based on the terrain and the span lengths
11 that we have, but we do not expect any of our
12 structures to exceed 110 feet above the ground line.

13 Last, but not least, this is an overview
14 of some of the stakeholder outreach that we've done
15 to date. Our folks have been advising, educating,
16 and consulting with landowners in the greater
17 community. You know, again, this is some, but not
18 all, of the outreach we've done.

19 We're also partners with the Benton
20 Economic Partnership, part of the Foley Chamber of
21 Commerce, and have been members of those
22 organizations for a numbers of years. We also
23 hosted an open house for the community back in
24 August prior to submitting our application. We
25 mailed invites to everyone within a two-mile radius

1 of the project.

2 So Benton Solar looks forward to working
3 with, you know, all the local stakeholders, everyone
4 in the community to develop this project, which,
5 again, will bring a suite of benefits to the
6 community. So it's an over \$300 million capital
7 investment in Benton County and Minden Township.
8 There's significant economic benefits to the
9 landowners, the small businesses, and the community
10 as a whole through our solar production tax. There
11 are environmental benefits of adding 100 megawatts
12 of clean energy to the grid. It helps the State
13 achieve their carbon-free goals by 2040.

14 And, again, that continued community
15 engagement and support. So we hope to be a part of
16 the community not only through the development and
17 permitting of this project, but through the entire
18 construction and life -- operational life of the
19 project.

20 And here's my contact information. We
21 have a website for the project. The
22 BentonSolar@NextEraEnergy.com e-mail will go to me,
23 and it also has my own e-mail and my own cellphone
24 number. So please reach out if you have any
25 questions about the project or would like an update.

1 Thank you.

2 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Thank you, Micah and
3 Adam.

4 Now, we'll pass it on to Logan.

5 MR. LOGAN HICKS: First off, I just --
6 (Audio connection lost.)

7 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: We can't hear you. We
8 just heard you briefly for a second. You are
9 unmuted from my end, so you should be able to speak.

10 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Can you hear me now?

11 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Now, yes, I can.

12 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Okay. Sorry. I had to
13 switch my microphone. Apparently the one was not
14 working. Apologies. Thanks for --

15 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Right.

16 MR. LOGAN HICKS: -- dealing with that.

17 Yeah. So I just wanted to thank everyone
18 for showing up on the call tonight. Input from the
19 public is very important for me to get my job done
20 correctly and, you know, efficiently. So, you know,
21 I thank everyone who shows up and anyone who will be
22 commenting on the scope of the environmental
23 assessment, which I'll be going through.

24 Next slide, Cezar, please.

25 So tonight I'm just going to go over some

1 real quick items. First, I'm just going to, kind
2 of, give you a background about the Department of
3 Commerce, who I work for. I work for the Energy
4 Environmental Review and Analysis Unit, and
5 that's -- our entire idea -- our entire team is
6 tasked with creating an environmental review
7 document, which I will also go over.

8 We'll also cover how to comment and why
9 it's important, and then we'll get into question and
10 comments. We'll open it up to you folks, the
11 public, to -- you know, if you'd like to -- have any
12 oral comments or, you know, questions to ask of
13 NextEra or us.

14 So I work with the Department of
15 Commerce. We are tasked by the Public Utilities
16 Commission -- who Cezar works for -- to create an
17 environmental assessment, which is a review document
18 that covers the project, and it's in regard to the
19 area in which it's being built.

20 Some of the things that we like to cover
21 in the EA are types of human and environmental
22 impacts. You know, so socioeconomics for humans or
23 like, you know, water quality for environmental
24 impacts. We like to look at strategies that can
25 help avoid, minimize, or mitigate any of these

1 potential impacts.

2 And the idea with this environmental
3 assessment is that we are coming at it as a third
4 party. So we're not with the Minnesota Public
5 Utilities Commission and we're not with NextEra.
6 This is a pure third-party unbiased document that we
7 are creating that is designed to be a decision -- to
8 inform the PUC when they decide if this project will
9 be green-lit or not.

10 So the reason that we are at the
11 meeting -- we're having this meeting today, besides
12 public information, is mostly to get public input.
13 So that is you folks who may live in the area, who
14 know the area better than we do, and it's nice for
15 you guys to let us know what you think is most
16 important when we're looking at an environmental
17 assessment.

18 Now, an environmental assessment has a
19 standard rubric of different things that we do look
20 at. However, it's kind of a wide net, and we're
21 looking for more of a focused approach from, you
22 know, input from you guys. You guys are the ones
23 that know what's going on best in the area. So we'd
24 like to get your input to know what we'd like to
25 focus and look at during -- while we're creating

1 this environmental assessment.

2 Some things that you guys can talk about
3 are, like, different environmental impacts that
4 you'd like to see, you know, really focused on,
5 right? Like whether it's aesthetics or, you know, a
6 socioeconomic issue, let us know, and we could
7 really focus in on that on our environmental
8 assessment.

9 You know, there's -- there's other things
10 that you can talk about, like unique characteristics
11 of the project area. Say there's something
12 on the -- like, that you know, like, a creek runs
13 through here, but we don't see it on the map, let us
14 know, and then we can definitely get that inputted
15 and, you know, analyzed.

16 So the draft scoping document will become
17 available -- the draft EA will become available in
18 July.

19 Was that correct, Cezar, I believe?

20 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: The draft itself, I
21 believe, it's March.

22 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Oh, no, the scoping
23 decision's in March.

24 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: And the actual
25 document is July, yes, you are right.

1 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Thank you.

2 So yeah, July, the environment assessment
3 will come out, and with that, we will have another
4 meeting. Which you guys can come forward, let us
5 know, say, we saw that you put this in there, but,
6 you know, we really want you to investigate it
7 further. And then we can take a look at that and,
8 you know, get that handled and analyzed.

9 So this isn't the first -- so this is
10 just the first of the meetings that you guys will
11 have to let us know what you're feeling, but there
12 will be more time for you guys to also, you know,
13 comment and ask any questions as well.

14 Next slide.

15 So with this, there's also a transmission
16 line, and with transmission lines, we do -- we take
17 route alternative suggestions from the public as
18 well. However, they have to meet a certain list of
19 criteria. So number one being you have to submit
20 the suggestion on time. Cezar mentioned
21 January 31st is the deadline for comments and
22 suggestions and things like that. So this route
23 alternative must be turned in before the 31st.

24 It needs to meet the needs of the
25 project, and it needs to be feasible. So the idea

1 is that -- and, also, it needs to describe an impact
2 and the mitigation for that impact as well. So,
3 say, you know, you -- there's a line going through
4 your backyard and you don't like it there, you can't
5 just say, I don't like it there. Because then it
6 goes to someone else's backyard, it doesn't really
7 mitigate any sort of impact.

8 But say, hey, it's going, you know,
9 through some trees. I don't like it, but I don't
10 want those trees to be cut down, then you can do
11 that. Now, granted, I don't know if this line is
12 actually going through trees, but that's just an
13 example for a way to mitigate an impact for a route
14 alternative suggestion.

15 Next slide there, Cezar, please.

16 Okay. So there's multiple ways to
17 comment. As Cezar mentioned, on one slide there was
18 a website. I have an e-mail address. I also have a
19 mailing address, however you want to get it to me.
20 But at the end of this presentation here, we will
21 have time for the public to make any oral comments
22 so you can get it on record and you can talk about
23 it.

24 So, once again, my mailing address and
25 e-mail address are right there. Please make sure

1 you have your comments in by the 31st, you know,
2 just so we can give them time -- like, everything
3 timely put together and put into the record so we
4 can, you know, move the process along.

5 All right. So some quick commenting
6 etiquette. So one speaker at a time, that will be
7 pretty easy because I'll be the one to mute you or
8 unmute you as needed to. So when you first start
9 speaking, please state and spell your name since we
10 have a court reporter here, Christine, who is taking
11 the -- taking the written statements for the record.

12 So I would also like you to just please
13 limit your comments to a few minutes. If you have
14 more to say, you can -- you can absolutely come back
15 again. We just want to make sure that everyone has
16 a chance to get through with anything they had to
17 say. Once everyone has gotten through, if you want
18 to come back on and speak more, feel free to so.

19 Another important thing to do is maintain
20 respect for others. No name calling, no jabbing --
21 taking jabs at anyone. You know, we're trying to
22 keep it nice and polite. And please make sure you
23 try to direct your comments and/or questions to the
24 scope of the environmental assessment. You know,
25 we're not trying to, you know, go on different

1 tangents here. We're trying to keep it nice and
2 concise and as on-topic as we can, please.

3 Okay. So with that, next slide, Cezar.
4 And there should be one more there.

5 Oh, yeah, so right there it says the
6 circle chat button is open. However, if you would
7 just like to use your raise-hand option, that also
8 works. Then, I'll be able to unmute you, and
9 anybody who would like to ask any questions, the
10 floor is open. Feel free to raise your hand or, you
11 know, shoot something in the chat button, and I will
12 unmute you and then you can have your say.

13 MS. AMANDA OTHOUDT: Logan.

14 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Yes.

15 MS. AMANDA OTHOUDT: Amanda Othoudt, O --
16 Amanda, A-M-A-N-D-A, O-T-H-O-U-D-T. I'm with Benton
17 Economic Partnership. I just have a few questions
18 for you. Can you lay out what that remediation plan
19 is? So after the lease, after the project is
20 complete and the lease is done, can you talk a
21 little bit about the remediation plan that you have
22 in place, or if you have one in place?

23 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Yeah. I'll let NextEra
24 answer that. I guess, the decommissioning plan is
25 what you're alluding to there, Amanda?

1 MS. AMANDA OTHOUDT: Yes.

2 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Yes, okay. I'll let
3 them answer that.

4 MS. AMANDA OTHOUDT: Thank you.

5 MR. ADAM GRACIA: Thanks for the
6 question, Amanda. Yes, so we have a decommissioning
7 plan included in our application. You know, at a
8 high level, the goal of the decommissioning plan is
9 to restore the site to the conditions that it were
10 before we came and put the infrastructure in place.

11 So we're removing all the solar panels,
12 foundations up to four feet, and then recycling or
13 refurbishing and reusing those panels at an
14 alternate site. So overall, though, the scope of
15 the decommissioning plan covers, you know, how we're
16 going to remove and restore the land to what it was
17 before.

18 And I -- on top of that, we also will
19 enter into a bond or surety with Benton County.
20 Which will, essentially, you know, provide a
21 monetary bond that -- for whatever reason, if
22 NextEra can't follow through on the -- or does not
23 follow through on the decommissioning plan, the
24 county is -- has a monetary bond in order to remove
25 the infrastructure. So -- and that is reevaluated

1 every five years. So it adjusts for inflation and
2 changes in the price of the decommissioning.

3 MS. AMANDA OTHOUDT: Great. Thank you so
4 much.

5 MR. LOGAN HICKS: All right. Is there
6 anybody else that has any questions, comments?

7 Let's see, I've got one in the chat here.
8 It says it's from "LRusin," L-R-U-S-I-N: There was
9 a lot of information on the benefits slash pros
10 financially of the project. Could you please talk
11 about the cons or negatives of the project,
12 particularly to the homeowners and landowners
13 surrounding it?

14 MR. ADAM GRACIA: Yeah. So thank you for
15 the question. So one of the things that we
16 definitely take into account is the visual impact of
17 the site. So for residences within 1,000 feet of
18 the project, we are developing a visual screening
19 plan in accordance with the Benton County ordinance
20 for their community solar gardens.

21 So we are using that to develop a
22 screening plan to minimize the impact for
23 surrounding residences and homes outside of the
24 project boundary. That screening plan will include
25 either fences, berms, or landscaping, or some

1 combination of the three. We're still developing
2 the specifics of that plan, but that is the
3 intention to minimize that impact on the community.

4 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Adam, thank you.

5 Anybody else have any questions,
6 comments?

7 MS. AMANDA OTHOUDT: I have a couple
8 other ones, but I'll -- I mean, I can let other
9 people go, too, if you want.

10 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Yeah. Go for it
11 Amanda, please.

12 MS. AMANDA OTHOUDT: Okay. So another
13 question I had, and I don't know if it's been
14 addressed, but -- so can you talk to -- a little bit
15 about the surrounding fire stations and your
16 communication with them?

17 Do they -- are they equipped with the
18 correct fire equipment, dry chemicals, whatever they
19 need, or other specialized extinguishing agents to,
20 kind of, control any lithium battery fires that
21 could potentially happen over the next few years or
22 whatever? Can you talk to that a little bit?

23 MR. ADAM GRACIA: Yeah, absolutely. So
24 for the first part of your question in terms of our,
25 you know, specific engagement, so like I said, last

1 year we coordinated with the Benton County emergency
2 management department to set up a meeting with
3 representatives from local fire departments. So
4 that was -- sorry, the Foley Fire Department and the
5 Sauk Rapids Fire Department had a representative
6 there. We talked through the overall -- just an
7 overview of the battery storage facility as a whole
8 to, kind of, introduce the technology.

9 And then in terms of, you know, how that
10 emergency action plan is developed and the safety
11 precautions in place down the road, I'll turn it
12 over to our battery safety expert, Josh Adams.

13 MR. JOSH ADAMS: Hi. Yeah, Josh Adams
14 here. So as far as making sure that they've got the
15 right equipment, the approach when -- in the rare
16 occurrence of a thermal event is to maintain the
17 safety of personnel. So we actually specifically
18 advise against the fire departments taking any
19 active suppression approaches, and to basically set
20 up a perimeter. Take a perimeter approach, prevent
21 any spread to any neighboring areas, and to keep
22 their personnel safe.

23 These systems are designed and go through
24 rigorous, varying levels of safety testing to
25 demonstrate and prove that in the event of a thermal

1 runaway that you won't have any propagation or
2 spread to any of the neighboring containers. So --
3 and all of our systems are tested and proven to do
4 that. So the approach is safety and allowing the
5 fire to terminate itself, so there's no special
6 equipment required.

7 MS. AMANDA OTHOUDT: Thank you.

8 MR. LOGAN HICKS: All right. Thank you.

9 We have another question in the chat from
10 "LRusin" again. I hope I'm saying that correct. If
11 not, I do apologize. They ask: Can you touch on
12 the impact to property value surrounding the solar
13 panel fields?

14 MR. ADAM GRACIA: Yes, absolutely. So in
15 our application in Appendix H, we have a market
16 impact analysis that we conducted. So that looks at
17 solar projects across the country. It also
18 specifically dove into properties in Minnesota,
19 Iowa, and Wisconsin that are near solar projects.
20 So it evaluated proximity to the solar project, and
21 it used similar properties and houses and -- that
22 you would see with this project. And their result
23 was that there was no correlation between property
24 value and proximity to a solar project.

25 MR. LOGAN HICKS: All right. Thank you.

1 Anybody else?

2 Amanda, you said you had a couple more
3 questions. Did you have anything else as well?

4 Does anybody have any --

5 MS. AMANDA OTHOUDT: I do.

6 MR. LOGAN HICKS: -- questions they would
7 like to bring forward?

8 MS. AMANDA OTHOUDT: I have one more
9 question, and it relates to just the construction of
10 the project. Are you hiring local companies?

11 MR. ADAM GRACIA: Yeah. So our intent
12 for this project is to use local union labor. We're
13 in the process of getting a general contractor for
14 the project. But, yes, we will specify they will
15 use local union labor for it.

16 MS. AMANDA OTHOUDT: Thank you.

17 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Thank you.

18 All right. Anybody else? Any more
19 questions, comments towards the environmental
20 assessment, scoping, anything of the sort?

21 Yeah. And as I said before, you know,
22 this isn't the only time you get a chance to make a
23 comment. As I said, e-mail me, go to that website
24 that we had posted earlier, mail me a letter,
25 anything you would like, and it will get into the --

1 it will get into the record, and it will be put in
2 front of the Public Utilities Commission. They'll
3 read it. So, you know, everybody's voice does
4 count. So, please, anything that you would like to
5 put forward, feel free to do so.

6 I am still not seeing anything. I don't
7 know, Cezar, how long you would like to give it
8 before we call it, but I'll let you decide that one.

9 MR. CEZAR PANAIT: Yes. Just scanning
10 through the participants list here, I don't see any
11 other hands raised; and a quick scan of the chat
12 function, no new comments received.

13 So with that, please, if you have
14 something that comes up and you just missed the
15 opportunity to ask your question, please go ahead
16 and send us a written comment. And send them --
17 address the comments to Logan, as we assume most of
18 the comments are going to be related to the scope of
19 the environmental document.

20 And if you have questions about the
21 process, please go ahead and then reach out to me at
22 the Public Utilities Commission. And we'll help you
23 out in terms of being able to participate in the
24 review process.

25 So with that, scanning one last time the

1 list of participants, no new -- no hands are raised
2 and, also, no additional chat questions. So I've
3 got 5 -- 6:49 p.m., and with that, I think we can
4 call the meeting.

5 And we want to say thank you very much
6 for taking time out of your evening to participate
7 in our public information and scoping meeting, and
8 we are adjourned. Thank you, everybody. Have a
9 good evening.

10 (Public comment concluded.)
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